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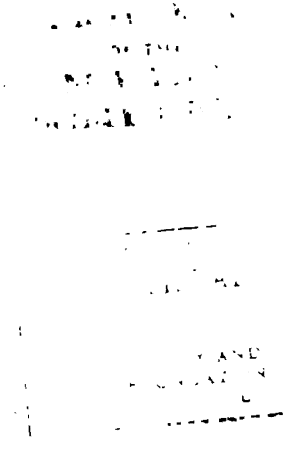
THE MAN WHO SAW WRONG

BY

JACOB FISHER



HER LIPS BARELY PARTED AS IF REPEATING THE WORDS SHE HAD JUST READ.

THE MAN WHO SAW WRONG

By

JACOB FISHER

AUTHOR OF "THE CRADLE OF THE DEEP"

FRONTISPIECE BY

GEORGE GIBBS

PHILADELPHIA

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CHAPTER I

A SINGULAR PARTNERSHIP

"PETERS, is Mr. Payne in the club?"

"Mr. Morton Payne, sir? In the large chair, this way, by the window, sir."

Young Mr. Lawrence was half-way across the big, dim room before the servant finished.

"Morton! Well, by George, you benighted old expatriate, how are you? I just heard you were back," he exclaimed, as Payne rose and grasped his outstretched hand. "Been West for a month, you know. Only home yesterday. How in the world are you? Anyway, you haven't lost your grip while you've been— Oh, I beg pardon, didn't know I was interrupting. Hello, Lavigne."

"Not at all," said Julius Lavigne, emerging from the depths of a near-by chair, and shaking down his trouser-legs. "I was just going. Well, Morton, it's all fixed then. We'll expect you next week. Good-bye. 'Bye, Allan."

Lawrence watched Lavigne's quick, lithe shape across the half-lighted room. "I wish that fellow wouldn't call me 'Allan,'" he said, as he turned to Payne. "I thought you didn't like him, either."

"It's queer," said Payne; "I don't. That is, I think I don't when he isn't about, but when we meet the feeling of dislike seems to—well, I can't exactly describe it—seems to—er, dissipate, flow out from between us, or something, and we act as friendly as two dogs. It's rather uncanny."

Lawrence shook his head. "It doesn't dissipate with me. He makes me bristle like a terrier. I can't stand for him at all."

"There, there, Fido. Good old dog," laughed Payne, drawing him to a seat. "Cover your teeth and drop your hackles. He's gone. Sit down and tell me what's been happening." And he touched a bell.

"My dear fellow, I can't tell *you* anything. You've been in town a month while I——"

"But you don't suppose I can get abreast of a year's doings in a month," protested Payne. "There must be thousands of goings-on that I haven't an inkling of as yet."

A club servant suddenly stood beside them.

"Long Scotch for mine," said Lawrence.

Payne nodded toward his own empty glass.

"Same old gin-and-water?" asked Lawrence. "Your tastes, Mort, savor of the extraordinary. Gin and Lavigne!"

He shook his head mournfully. "But come on, tell us all about your year. Where are you dining to-night? Nowhere? Then here, with me. Peters, tell Franz to get us up something

in one of the small rooms. We'll be ready any time."

Lawrence lighted a cigarette and lay back, comfortably. "All ready! Begin," he said.

"You're too eager," returned Payne, smiling. "If I begin now it won't last through dinner. There isn't really much to tell. You know that thing of Stilson's, that I was to get up the drawings for? Well, that took me three months at hard labor, mostly in the slums of Paris, studying habits and customs and all that, you know. Mighty interesting, and all the more so for never knowing just when the object of your observations was going to call in the other Apaches and thug you. But none of them did, and when the set was done I cut out Paris for good and all, and loafed about the country, Brittany, of course, and the Italian lakes, and finally, St. Moritz for a holiday. I wrote two or three stories—you may have seen them—the ones with the mediæval color-sketches—and that is really about all, except——"

Payne hesitated, and Lawrence looked quickly up. "Not a girl?" he demanded.

"No, not a girl."

"What, then?"

"Well, Allan, I haven't told anybody; that is, no one but Lavigne, and him only because I was compelled to by a queer coincidence. I'm going in for oil."

"Oil!" exclaimed Lawrence, sitting up. "Oil!

Good on your head, Mort. I knew you'd come to it at last. What started you off?"

"It was those water-color things as much as anything," Payne explained. "I'd been doing a good deal of it, off and on, to get my feeling for color, and just before I left Paris I got some tubes in a half-doubtful sort of way, and something prompted me to try it out. Of course, it was an accident—just bull luck—but I did one study of a village girl that seemed pretty good, and so I finished it up."

"Where is it now?" asked Lawrence, looking hard at his friend, who was gazing guiltily at the darkening street outside. Payne was silent.

"Come, out with it," urged Lawrence, threateningly.

"It's—it's in the Old Salon," admitted Payne, half proud, half shy. "But, as I say, it probably was an accident."

"Unsigned?"

"Unsigned."

'You—old—dog!" cried Lawrence, throwing himself on Payne with enthusiasm. "*You* had a *picture* hung in the *Salon* and never said a word about it? Well—I'll—be—damned!"

"So," continued Payne, "I thought I'd drop the stories and the illustrating for a while, and see what I could really do. I painted hard all the rest of the time, and did several things that might pass in a crowd of little fellows; but nothing so good as the first. Then came the Wosten-

holm Foundation, and the announcement of the first American Salon next Fall; so I came home to have a try for it.

"If I can make it in any sort of form it will mean that I shall have the confidence to continue and drop the other things for good. If I can't, why, I shall be no worse off. It's just a chance."

"Mort," exclaimed Lawrence, "I'm pleased 'most to death at yu', as they say in that dear West; but what are your plans right now? What the devil has that fellow Lavigne got to do with them? You and he had been having a long session. I could tell by the way he shook down his trousers."

Payne smiled and rose. "Come," he said. "There's Peters, and Franz's dinner will be getting cold. I'll tell you all about it."

As they sauntered out into the large hall of the club, Lawrence paused at the desk to light a cigarette, and as Payne stood for a moment, waiting, in the full light of the electrolier, Allan noticed how well he looked.

Payne was just above six feet, with the build of an athlete, and none of the heaviness that is apt to come to a man of quiet habits of life after thirty. He was smooth of face, but he still had all of his hair, something to be remarked upon in these days. In the year since Lawrence had seen him his features had taken on an expression of quiet strength that well became him, though it proclaimed the approach of more serious years.

When the elevator had shot them to the fourth floor, they found the estimable Peters waiting to show them their room.

"Thank you, Peters," said Lawrence as he entered. "Nothing could be better."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," said the man, pleased at his small success. "There'll be a bottle of the '87 you're so fond of, sir, at the proper time," and Peters bowed himself out with his best *maître-d'hôtel* air, to caution the waiter in charge against letting the precious '87 *frappé* in its cooler.

"Well?" It was Lawrence who spoke, as the two faced each other over the first course.

Payne laughed. "You're nothing but a boy still, aren't you?" he said. "Suppose you start, yourself. What have you been doing in the West? Business or pleasure?"

"Mighty little pleasure, I assure you," Lawrence returned. "The food you get in some of those mining towns is enough to turn you gray. Remember, please, that this is only the third civilized meal I have had in a whole month, and don't comment on my manner of taking it. A month of lunch counters and gum-chewing 'biscuit-shooters' in Utah and Montana has nearly corrupted me. Never again, if I can help it. We're going to take in that Culver boy next month and I shall see to it that the legal business of our copper-mining clientele is made exclusively his department."

"Lord," commented Payne. "You talk like an old timer with a list of rich malefactors as long as your arm. Why, you must be nearly twenty-seven."

"Twenty-eight," retorted Lawrence, "you needn't be so patronizing, with your thirty-five mis-spent years."

Throughout the meal Payne skilfully steered Lawrence away from the subject of his plans, and it was only when the waiter had left them to their cigars and their coffee, that he consented to talk.

"You see, Allan," he explained, "it's something of a secret, and not entirely my secret, at that. Lavigne——"

"Yes, Lavigne," the other broke in. "That's what gets me. You and Lavigne, of all men in the world."

"But I told you it was a coincidence. I don't like it, any better than you would, but I can't help it. It just happened so."

"Well, I'll try to control my feelings," Lawrence said, refusing a cigar and lighting a cigarette. "Let's hear the worst."

"In the first place," began Payne, "I had decided on a subject before the news about the Wostenholm Foundation and the new American Salon was more than a vague rumor. I had even made one or two studies in a tentative kind of way, but I couldn't get the sort of model I wanted, and had dropped the thing. I hadn't

intended to come over for six months, at least, for I wanted to watch some of the fellows in Paris a while before striking out for myself. But when the announcement came, something seemed to tell me to come home and have a try. So here I am.

"The next thing was a model. I looked over all the professionals in New York, and they wouldn't do—any of them."

"You're particular," grinned Lawrence, through a cloud of smoke.

"Yes, I am. I've got the thing so firmly in my mind that it's got to be just what I want, or nothing. I can't afford to fail, especially if this Salon story leaks out, and of course it will, somehow."

"So Lavigne found you the model, and you let him into the secret, and the devil has learned of it by this time, and there'll be hell to pay," interrupted Lawrence. "I see the whole thing. You'll regret it, Morton. That fellow Lavigne is Satan's own brother. He smirches everything he touches. Look at him, with his smooth, yellow face, his sharp, white teeth, and his eyes that never, never smile, even when he laughs—if he ever does really laugh. Bah!"

Payne smiled patiently at the younger man's prejudice and intolerance.

"No, Allan, you've got it all wrong. He didn't find me my model; I found her myself, but the coincidence came in his finding the same

girl and setting his heart on getting her for *his* model, too!"

"I'd like to see her," remarked Lawrence, skeptically. "I can't imagine Lavigne painting anything from a model who comes closer to your ideal than anyone else in New York—or Paris—and it's quite evident this girl is the one you've been looking for."

"I have thought the same thing," said Payne, "and puzzled over it, but I've given it up, for we none of us will know what Lavigne is doing until the exhibition."

"So," said Lawrence, "she has taken you both on, and you'll stick in New York all summer to accommodate each other."

"Not at all," Payne contradicted. "She wouldn't pose for either of us, in New York. That's why I'm getting out next week, for the season."

"I give it up," said Lawrence in despair. "Tell it your own way—only tell it."

"Well, the short of it is this. After I got back and had looked all through the list without a glimmer of success, I happened to go into Duvelle's one day for some brushes and things, and when I looked at the girl who waited on me, I almost jumped, for I knew that she was the *one*. I talked to her, and after I had run in for two or three days together, just, you know, to sort of let my earnestness make an impression, I asked her if she wouldn't pose."

"You told her, of course," Lawrence broke in, "that you had been hunting through two hemispheres for her, and she consented."

"Wrong again," answered Payne, quietly. "I didn't, and she didn't. She's not a professional, of course, but it seems that she has posed for the head to one or two of the younger Duvelle's pupils, so she turned me down very decently, and was not at all shocked. As a matter of fact, she's a very nice girl. The reason she refused, she said, is because her aunt, with whom she lives, has been very ill, and they are planning to go away together, somewhere out of New York, for the summer. This is imperative, she told me, if her aunt's health is to be saved."

"And Lavigne?" asked Lawrence.

"Then she told me Lavigne had already asked her to sit to him, and she had given him the same answer. I could see it was hard for her to refuse. The money would be quite welcome, I expect. Her aunt must be an awful drag on her purse, for Duvelle's isn't noted for generosity."

"Well, how did you win her over?"

"I thought of all sorts of ways; lay awake half the night, thinking. You see it meant a good deal, and I couldn't afford to lose her. Towards morning, it must have been, I had an idea, and the next day, or rather, the same day, I went to see her again. I offered her so much a week, enough to send her aunt to the country all summer, if she'd stay and help me. And she wouldn't do

it. Her aunt needed her, she said, and I saw, then, that nothing would be of any use."

"Why, you great, blundering idiot!" Lawrence exclaimed. "Why didn't you offer to go *with* her and her aunt, wherever she wanted to go, and paint her every day, and live in a tent, or something, if necessary?"

"Why? Simply because I wasn't bright enough to think of it. But it seems that Lavigne's mind is of the same high order as yours. Two days after my defeat I had a note from her, asking me to call. I went, two steps at a time, and she told me Lavigne had made her a proposition that she was willing to accept, provided I could enter into the arrangement.

"Lavigne, she said, had offered her and her aunt the use of a bungalow on the Long Island North shore, near a place he rents, if she would engage herself to sit for him during the summer. She told him I had asked her to sit also, and that she did not feel that she would be acting fairly toward me if she accepted his proposal and left me out.

"Lavigne at once said there was a place for rent near his, and that I could come down too, if I liked, and we could use her together. Well, what could I do? It was the only way, and I took it. Lavigne came to see me about the house. I agreed, and there you are. We start the partnership next week."

"Partnership!" echoed Lawrence, as he dropped

his cigarette-end carefully into his coffee cup. "A league with the devil is a better name for it."

"Oh, come, Allan," Payne said, with a bare touch of impatience in his tone. "Just what have you got against Lavigne? He may not be your sort. He certainly isn't mine, but there are certain qualities in him that we can't help commending and admiring. He is earnest, and a hard worker, minds his own business, so far as I have been able to see, and he's an artist, first, last and all the time."

"Still——" Allan hesitated with a shrug.

"Still, you don't like him," Payne laughed.

"Exactly. I don't like him. He may be an artist, as you say, and he may mind his own business, but he's not a gentleman. I—I've seen him ogle women in the street, and you know how he sits in the windows, here, and stares. I've heard it remarked upon, outside, and in no very tender way. None of the fellows here, fellows of his own guild, too, like him much better than I do.

"Oh," he concluded, "it isn't any one thing that I can set my finger on and indict him for. It's the character of the man. Utterly interested in and for himself; no thought, except for what he dubs his 'art,' and his ambition. He's the sort of man, mark me, Morton, who would knife his best friend, if he had such a thing, to further his own ends. He—he's rotten," Lawrence finished earnestly, "and if this girl is worth the

trouble, as you seem to think, she ought not to be allowed to get into his clutches."

"Allan, my dear fellow, you talk like the good old friend-of-the-family in a melodrama. That girl will be as impersonal a matter to him as a mannikin would be. Besides, I shall be there, too. I hope you can trust me, at all events."

"You!" scoffed Lawrence. "You would never be allowed to see that the girl needed a protector until it was too late. What's her name?"

"Her name?" Payne repeated. "Oh, didn't I tell you? It's Adrea, Adrea Varrick."

There was a soft knocking at the door, and Peters entered.

"Mr. Payne, sir," said the servant, "Mr. Lavigne is below. He asked me to find you, sir."

"Very well, Peters," replied Payne, as Lawrence started to his feet, "tell Mr. Lavigne we should be happy to have him join us. And Peters," he added as the man turned, "bring us another bottle of that '87."

"Oh, no," growled Lawrence as the man closed the door. "I'm going."

Payne stretched out an arm. "Sit still, old fellow. You misjudge Lavigne. He can be very entertaining at times. You ought to know him better."

CHAPTER II

JULIUS LAVIGNE

LAVIGNE entered the room in the quick, soft-footed manner that was characteristic of him, pausing for the fraction of a second just inside the door and glancing from Payne to Lawrence, as if to make sure of his reception. He advanced as the others rose and gave a hand to each, the left to Lawrence.

"My dear friends," he said, halting slightly after the first words as he felt the grip Allan's left hand had purposely given his. "It is very good of you to let me interrupt in this fashion. I completely forgot this is the first time you have seen each other."

"Not at all," said Payne, heartily. "Sit down here and make yourself comfortable. Will you try some of Lawrence's favorite '87? I was just telling Allan of our arrangement when Peters brought in your card."

"Indeed!" said Lavigne. "Queer coincidence, wasn't it, Allan—that about the Varrick girl, you know? You never saw her, I fancy. Wonderful young person, eh, Morton? Very lucky strike, I call it, for her as well as for us. But I came, Morton, to tell you it's all fixed about your

studio. I've seen Warren's attorney, who does all his business when he's abroad, and when I told him who wanted it he was only too glad to consent. And the rent will be nominal. The caretaker will stay and do for you, too, unless you have other plans."

As the two discussed the details of their arrangements, Lawrence sat back and watched the man he disliked. Julius Lavigne was in the neighborhood of forty, and his figure was slim, strong and alert. He was of a somewhat swarthy type, with a smooth olive-tinted skin that showed above his rather thin, pointed beard; straight, dark hair that as yet showed no hint of gray; and long, slim, firm-looking hands that showed their capability in every graceful motion.

But his chief feature was his eyes. Feline, was Lawrence's thought of them, and he was not wrong. At first glance one would have been tempted to say there was a cast in one, and perhaps both; but this impression lasted only temporarily, a second look showing that it was merely that the eyes, which slanted upward slightly at the outer corners, were set rather near together, and that the left was appreciably larger than the right.

This, combined with their color, a greenish gray, and the fact that though his white, sharp teeth might flash in laughter, his eyes never gave back the faintest show of mirth, made the man's face one that remained long in the memory.

Lavigne's motions were quick, but it was the long, smooth calculated quickness and sureness of the cat or the panther, not the short jerkiness of the nervous temperament. One needed only a moment's contact with those cold, steady eyes to discover that the things commonly known as "nerves" had been forgotten in his make-up.

Lawrence had known Lavigne, at least as a speaking and club acquaintance, for a number of years, and though, as he had said, there was nothing specific in his dislike, there was a general uneasy feeling that the man was not sincere, that he was one thing on the surface and quite another below.

As he sat and talked with Payne of the summer's plans, Lawrence fancied he detected, in his apparent frankness of speech and manner, the schooled effort of the habitual dissembler. There was an impression that his polite good-fellowship was being ever so slightly over-done.

They were speaking of Miss Varrick.

"I can tell you, Payne," Lavigne said, with one of his unsmiling laughs, "I tried my best to keep you out of it. You know—and I warn you now—that I'm a perfect monument of selfishness when it comes to models. I've had my eye on the girl for weeks, but I didn't know she ever posed, and she is so perfectly impersonal with one at Duvelle's, that I hesitated about speaking of it to her. I didn't muster the courage, in fact, until the very day you discovered her."

"What, another close coincidence?" smiled Payne. "There seems to be *kismet* in this, somewhere."

"No," replied Lavigne. "It wasn't a coincidence, that time—that is, unless my happening to be in the place when you first saw her was a coincidence. No, I knew you hadn't seen me, but I was there all the same, and knowing how hard you had been trying to find a model, I decided, from certain things about your manner of looking at Miss Varrick, that in your own mind, at least, your quest was over. So it was up to me to speak to her, or see her gobbled up under my very nose, that is, of course, if she was to be gobbled."

Lavigne paused to take a sip from his glass, and Lawrence thought he noted a look of annoyance on Payne's good-humored face.

Lavigne continued: "But the whole thing *is* queer. I wonder if by any chance we see the girl alike."

Lawrence thought the unequal green-gray eyes narrowed a trifle.

"I've been wondering the same thing," he broke in. "What was it attracted you, Lavigne?"

Lavigne glanced up quickly at the unexpected question from Allan.

"Have you ever seen her?" he countered. "Well, she is the most absolutely perfect embodiment of innocence I have ever seen. How a girl can live in New York and remain so utterly

unmarked by the grimy world that eddies and swirls about her, I can't even imagine. But this girl has, or at least she has every appearance of it. Why, she can't even have read the papers. Aside from the beauty of her features and her coloring, which alone would make her worth while, she has the unconscious serenity of an angel. Isn't that what took you, Morton?"

In an instant Payne was the artist. "Exactly," he agreed with enthusiasm. "Her serene innocence, as you say, Lavigne; that exactly describes it. But she has intelligence, too—a lot of it, and that is what makes her remarkable. You see plenty of girls, everywhere, who are purity itself; but this girl has a mind, and therein lies the prize."

Lavigne's lips smiled as Payne spoke, and Lawrence, who watched, likened it to the smile of a cat who has been at the cream jug—and is satisfied.

Lavigne lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, blowing the smoke in rings toward the ceiling.

"Morton," he said, "it seems to me that this is a rare chance for a distinctly sporting competition. Here we are, two patient geniuses, and as far as I know, workmen of entirely different methods, both finding the something we have been seeking, in the same subject, and both ready to do our best for admission to the first American Salon.

"Apparently, the thing we both have seen paramount in this girl is one and the same. Why shouldn't we have a little private competition of our own? I mean, let us do our best, and keep our work from each other, and from our friends. Besides adding a touch of rivalry, it will be all the better if neither of us knows exactly what the other is trying to accomplish. If we have chosen anything like the same subject, which seems quite probable, the sight of each other's progress would hamper us both, and tend to dull the edge of our originality; but if we keep it all a mystery, there will be twice the incentive for us both, as well as a possible interest at the end in seeing how nearly alike or how differently we have treated our ideals. What do you think of it, Morton?"

"It's an excellent idea, Lavigne. We *are* different, you know, and our conceptions of the same thing must naturally vary a good deal. There is only one part of it that I hesitate about, and that is the debarring of our friends. I, at least, find some of mine very helpful in their criticism, and it would seem a good deal like painting in the dark without it. For instance, Allan, here, is quicker and surer in picking a flaw, or in clinching a good point than I can ever hope to be, myself."

Lavigne protested; "I didn't mean," he said, "to make the game a burden instead of a help. Of course, draw on Allan all you like, and any

others who can aid. I merely intended to suggest that what we are doing should not become public property. It will be very easy to hint to our intimates that they should not talk outside, or with those who have seen the other's work."

"I'll agree to that," said Payne, filling the glasses. "Here's success to the game, and honor to the winner."

Lavigne rose and offered his hand. "I must go," he said. "I've held up your little reunion long enough. I shall go down to-morrow to start my menage, and I will speak to Mrs. Leighton, Warren's caretaker, if you like, and tell her to be ready for you—when? Miss Varrick and Mrs. Butler are to move into the cottage by Thursday, I believe."

"I think I will come on Saturday," Payne replied. "Tell her, please."

"What do you think of it, Allan?" Payne asked, when Lavigne had gone.

Lawrence sat thinking a moment, before he spoke. "I think," he said at last, "that it is a fine plan—for Lavigne."

"Why Lavigne?" asked Payne, a trifle impatiently.

"Because," said Allan, slowly, "Mort, I can't tell you. That is, I won't tell you what passed through my mind just now as he was speaking. You'd only think the less of me if I did. Go ahead with your plan. At least, there's no harm to you in it."

"Allan," said Payne, solemnly, "you ought to give up the law. It's spoiling your character. Half a dozen years ago you used to be the most frankly open boy I knew. Look at you now. You have consorted so much with your pet malefactors that you see a menace in every shadow, a sinister motive in the actions of half your fellow men. What in the world are you thinking of?"

"Nothing, Mort. Perhaps you're right. A portrait of me would never make a companion piece to the one of intelligent purity you contemplate giving to the jaded eyes of a sophisticated world. One thing, Lavigne has practically found out what you intend to paint, while he, with his secrecy proposition, is free to choose whatever he likes, and I'll venture the prediction now that it will be no closer to your subject than Heaven is to Hades."

"Nonsense, Allan," scoffed Payne, "you haven't seen Miss Varrick, that's all. Lavigne would never have chosen her if he hadn't in mind exactly the thing I saw in her—fearless, virginal innocence and purity. It fairly illumines her. Not that she isn't human too. She's not a prig nor a prude —just a good, sweet, normal girl with a sound body and a clear, honest outlook on life that hasn't been spoiled, yet, by the disillusionment of seeing things as they really are."

"Really, like that?" doubted Lawrence, genially. "I should like to know someone like that. Perhaps it would be good for me."

'I believe it would," Payne said, more than half in earnest. "Come down with me on Saturday and see for yourself."

"Thanks," said Lawrence, quietly, "I think I will."

CHAPTER III

'WARE WOLF!

IT was just past noon on Saturday when Lawrence and Payne, in the former's car, swung off the main road and headed north along the shore of Fairhaven Inlet. The day was warm with the early June sun, and the blue of the Sound in the far distance, backed by the cloudless sky, showed like a vista between pine-clad shores.

"Ever been down this way?" Lawrence inquired, peering ahead for some sign of the houses of which they were in search.

"No," said Payne, "but I believe we go nearly to the end of the Point before we can see the place."

Half a mile farther on they emerged from the piney growth upon a long point of land that sloped gently down on the right toward the mouth of the inlet, and on the left toward the Sound itself. Near the inlet shore, scattered along with plenty of elbow room between, were three houses. The first was a modest little cottage, stained green and set attractively in a group of pines that shaded it in the rear toward the road. The second was evidently a remodeled farm-house of

fairly good dimensions, with a wing on the north side, which served the owner as a studio. The third, the farthest toward the end of the Point, was a more pretentious, modern bungalow, half obscured by trees and shrubbery.

As the car passed the cottage, Lawrence glanced toward it and called Payne's attention. "That must be Miss Varrick's house," he said.

"Yes, probably, from Lavigne's description, though I can't see her anywhere."

"Oh, ho," returned Allan, "so you expected to find her watching, did you? She's probably over, posing for Lavigne. They've had two or three days to get acquainted and get their hours all settled. You'll have to take second choice. Which place is yours?"

"Right ahead, I think," said Payne, "the farm-house with the built-on wing."

They turned in at the gateway where bright-colored nasturtiums grew in profusion over the low stone posts, and crunched up the freshly-graveled drive. Voices came from within the house, and as they stopped, the upper half of the Dutch door swung open and revealed a girl, bearing an armful of crimson roses, and framed in the dark of the space behind her.

For an instant she stood gazing at the two occupants of the automobile, smiling, half in welcome and half in dismay.

"By George!" Lawrence whispered, "Payne, if you want a pose, you'll never find a better."

He fumbled at the throttle, and the motor roared; but he sat still, unconsciously staring at the picture in the doorway, now shown full-length as the lower panel opened. What he saw was Youth in its most delightful embodiment.

The girl was not more than twenty, with all the light, airy grace of her years—not above medium height, her figure slender, yet softly rounded in long, sweeping lines. As she stepped free of the shadow, and the sun fell full on her, Lawrence thought he had never seen so perfect a face. Its coloring seemed to be taken from the roses in her arms, and the moulding of her features from the perfection of their petals. Her eyes, half veiled from the bright glare by long, dark lashes, carried something that was half a smile, half wistfulness, in their frank, fearless glance, and he noticed that the hair that shaded her straight, fine brows and shone in coruscating masses above them, was pure copper in the sun, seal-brown in the shadow.

The rosy hue of her parted lips showed a flash of white between, as she stepped lightly to the porch to give them her greeting. She was gowned in soft white, from which sprung the firm, round column of her young throat, half-buried, now, in the riot of flowers in her arms. Her step, as she came forward, was graceful with the slender freedom of youth; and then her voice, sweet, full-toned, delicious.

"Welcome, Mr. Payne," she was saying, "we

were just putting on the finishing touches. If you could have been only half an hour later we should have been quite ready."

"I am sure it is perfect as it is," said Payne, greeting her; "and thank you so much for a most agreeable surprise. Let me present my friend, Allan Lawrence, Miss Varrick. I really brought him along to help me get fixed up. Now that it is all done I suppose he may as well trundle back to town."

Lawrence, hearing his name, scrambled from under the steering wheel, and took the girl's slim, firm hand for a moment in his.

"I hope you won't confirm that sentence, Miss Varrick, at least until we've had luncheon."

"Indeed I will not, Mr. Lawrence," she said. "And furthermore, the Court declares all roads from the Point closed until Monday morning."

"That's very friendly and hospitable," said Lawrence, "I shall try to deserve your clemency."

A quick step on the gravel caused them all to turn to see Lavigne coming up the walk. Lawrence thought he caught a sudden fluttering in the girl's glance, but she instantly recovered herself and gazed frankly at the newcomer.

"Hello, Morton! Hello, Allan!" called Lavigne; "didn't expect you until later in the day."

"I've just been telling Mr. Payne that we needed another half hour," said Miss Varrick. "Couldn't you show them about a little before luncheon? Then we shall be ready for you all."

Mrs. Leighton, a wholesome, motherly-looking woman of middle age, now appeared in the doorway. Payne and Lawrence were introduced, and Miss Varrick left them to oversee something inside.

"Come on," said Lavigne. "They're not ready for you, so you may as well stretch your legs and look at my place until they are."

The three set off in the direction of the bungalow at the end of the point, Lavigne calling attention to the natural beauties of the spot as they went.

Lavigne's bungalow was a somewhat pretentious affair, built in the form of a Greek cross, the spaces between all four of its arms, which formed the wings, being filled by verandas. In the center was an open court, with a red-tiled floor, and a fountain and pool in the middle. One wing was occupied by a sleeping room, another by a library, and a third by the kitchen. The fourth, facing the Sound, was the studio. This room was filled almost to overflowing with rugs, odd pieces of furniture, bits of old armor, eastern hangings and all the bric-a-brac collected desultorily in the life-time of an artist.

In the center was a low platform, used as a model-stand, covered with a huge tiger-skin. An easel, with a large canvas, hidden by a brilliant yellow scarf, stood near-by. On the walls were innumerable studies and sketches in black and white, sepia and in color, a few landscapes and

one or two marines, badly done. But for the most part the work was from life, a number of portraits, and the rest genre-pictures from models —all of women.

Payne, who had seen most of the things before, in Lavigne's quarters in town, looked about for new objects, but to Lawrence it was all new, and though he disliked the painter he found his pictures interesting.

Though a lawyer, he knew many of the artists of the day, and out of a natural appreciation and perception of beauty in many forms there had grown up in him a keen power of judgment and criticism. There was hardly an artist of note in New York who did not welcome Lawrence's opinion of his work. He was not familiar with Lavigne's, except as he had casually seen it at exhibitions, and he almost forgot his antipathy to the man as he glanced about the studio walls.

Lavigne noticed his interest. "I expect I'm honored by this visit of yours, Allan," he said. "There's a lot of stuff here that isn't unpacked yet, much better than these fly-blown things. They're mostly earlier work. I've tried to grow more serious of late."

Lawrence scarcely heard him. He was already absorbed in the collection, and stepped from one to another, with now and then a swift look of appreciation. He was forced to admit that most of Lavigne's work was good. In portraiture he was, perhaps, at his best. Here, the psycho-

logic quality was strongly marked, almost too pronounced, in fact, as several finished and unclaimed portraits of well-known women testified.

His drawing was also excellent, and his composition and color-methods intelligent and effective. But in all of the pictures where the imaginative power of the man was strongest, Lawrence noted a cynicism in conception and in execution that was almost satirical in its feeling.

There was one in particular, a study of a young girl in evening dress, whose lover had evidently just left her. She was seated before a dying open fire, and gazing down at the ring he had newly slipped on her engagement finger. There might have been the rapture of sweetest emotion in her smile, all the poetry of youth and love, real and fine and sincere—but there was not. Instead, her smile was a smile of triumph, of conquest, strangely old and hard on the girlish face, impalpably grim in its expression, yet so harsh and unexpected in its contrast to the young figure as to be veritably brutal. Lawrence shrugged and turned away.

"I suppose you've already gotten well-grounded for the *opus magnus* by this time," he said to Lavigne, who was pulling open a packet of sketches.

"No," he answered. "I've been too busy getting settled to touch even a stick of charcoal, and Miss Varrick has been still busier, with two households to oversee—I mean her own and Payne's. She's not even been over here as yet."

Lawrence left the two talking technic, and sauntered out on the east veranda. The breath of the breeze from off the Sound seemed cleanliness itself compared with the atmosphere of that woman-studded room. On a table by a hammock-couch there fluttered the luridly-inked pages of a magazine. Lawrence picked it up and idly turned the leaves. It was a late issue of a particularly vile Paris weekly. The most suggestive illustration was the cover-design, and worked into the border were some initials. They were purposely indistinct and elusive, but they caught Lawrence's eye, and stood out as under a magnifying glass. They were J. L.

At a hail from the studio he dropped the paper and turned again to the house.

"Oh, Allan," came Payne's big voice, "don't you think that half-hour must be almost up? I'm nearly famished."

Lawrence joined him, and they moved across the inner court of the bungalow, Lavigne volubly voicing his derision of the "bravura" methods of the disciples of Sargent and Sorolla.

"Can't you all come over and have tea this afternoon?" he broke off, as they reached the outer door. "You'll need something of the sort after all the fixing up that's ahead of you."

"Why, aren't you coming back with us?" asked Payne, hospitably. "I'm sure Miss Varrick expected you."

"No," said Lavigne, "I rarely eat in the middle

of the day. A siesta in a hammock works much better with me. Perhaps I'll drift over later, and see how you're coming on."

It was perhaps a quarter-mile to Payne's newly-acquired establishment, and although it was a bit farther, they chose the shore-path that wound its way close to the waters of the inlet.

Allan was the first to speak. "Mort, just what do you think it is that Lavigne sees in this girl?"

"Why, I don't know, I suppose that her figure or features or her general characteristics have appealed to him in some way that he can make use of for his exhibition picture."

"And is that as deep as you care to go?" demanded Lawrence.

"Why should I care to go deeper?" Payne returned. "I have little or no real interest in what Lavigne is trying to do. I am not enthusiastic, you know, over his rather childish proposal in regard to our pictures. I merely accepted it to seem agreeable."

"See here, Mort," Lawrence volleyed, stopping short and laying a weighty hand on his friend's shoulder. "Either you don't or won't understand. What can a man like Lavigne, who paints the things he paints, possibly have to do with a girl like Adrea Varrick as a model? How, as I said before I even saw the girl, could a model that suits you, for your purposes, have any living thing in common with his ideas?

"He has engaged her, just as you have, for the whole summer. She is going to be the only model for his picture. It isn't as if he wanted a head, or a neck, or a leg, or an arm. He wants *her* just as she is, perfections and imperfections, if she has any. So do you. In other words *she* is to be the picture you both will paint. There is no question of other models. She is the whole thing. I can see why you want her, now that I've met her, but I've also seen the sort of thing Lavigne paints, and in that whole roomful of women there wasn't one that you, by any stretch of imagination, could have even thought of painting.

"You know what sort of stuff it is, erratic—erotic, I don't know the word for it—but the idea is rotten, I know that, and so do you. It's not the subjects nor the poses nor the composition. Any of them might be hung in a home in Boston so far as the outward decency goes. But it's the way he handles them, the expressions, the real meanings, way down deep, below the surface, that make them so—so vile. There's no other word for it.

"Look at that study of the girl with the ring. He calls it 'The Betrothal.' 'The Bargain' would be a better name. Lavigne never painted anything so clean and so true as Adrea Varrick in his life. He never will, and I don't believe he even means to try!"

"Then what do you think he means to do with her?" asked Payne, half amused, half serious.

"Frankly, I don't know. He doesn't mean her any harm, I should say, that is, directly, or he never would have consented to this partnership arrangement, and her aunt, and all that. But there is something—something devilishly evil about the fellow that I can't yet fathom. It's too subtle, too ephemeral to get hold of, but it's there, it's there."

He walked on a few yards, Payne following. Suddenly he turned again.

"Mort, old man, this girl is a good girl. It shows in her eyes and in her beautiful face. She is down here, helpless, in your keeping. Look after her. The shepherd must not sleep when the wolf is abroad."

They had nearly reached the house when Adrea appeared on the porch and waved to them with the dinner-horn. As they walked up over the lawn, Payne noticed his friend's strides lengthen, and he smiled to himself as he mended his steps to keep pace with him.

CHAPTER IV

ARRANGEMENTS

WARREN, to whom Payne's place belonged, had bought it some years before, and had altered and improved the old farm-house to suit his taste and convenience, not, however, allowing it to lose its character of simple charm.

It was a story-and-a-half structure with dormer windows in its gable-roof and with large, square rooms and big, old-fashioned chimney-places. The original shingled roof and sides had been preserved in their weathered beauty, and served as a background for the profusion of climbing rose-vines, which nearly covered the house. The roses were just bursting into bloom, and their delicate pink with the green of the leaves and the soft gray of the walls combined to make a charming symphony of color.

The studio, in a wing on the north side of the main house, opened on a deep veranda, which ran the entire length of the west side, making a porch for the main entrance. Here Payne and Lawrence, on descending from their chambers, found a table laid for luncheon, with Adrea just in the act of placing upon it the roses she had

held in her arms when they arrived. Lawrence quickly noted that there were covers for two only.

"Aren't they beautiful?" Adrea was saying. "There are so many that one hardly knows when to stop picking. I never saw so many roses, and I love them so."

She finished the arrangement of the flowers with a dainty, caressing touch, as one might lift the light curls of a child, and looked up at both men with a smile.

"But—but," stammered Payne, staring at her and then at the table, "there are only two places. Aren't you going to stay?"

"Please, Miss Varrick," Lawrence broke in. "It will be only half a welcome without a hostess."

"Oh, I mustn't," she cried. "I should have been home half an hour ago. Aunt Margaret will be wondering about me. I've neglected her all the morning."

"Then run over and tell her that you are to take your first pose for the inexorable artist who engaged you, behind a tea cosey. We will wait for you," Lawrence insisted as Mrs. Leighton appeared with a tray on which were several steaming, covered dishes.

"But the chicken will be ruined. Must I?" Adrea appealed to Payne.

"Indeed you must," he smiled, "that is, unless your aunt really needs you. We'll wait, Mrs. Leighton," he nodded to that matron, who stood

balanced on the doorstep, fearfully awaiting his decision.

"Ah, Mr. Payne, I had hoped you were different, sir," the good lady mourned, "but I am coming to believe all you artist-folk are alike. Little respect for your meals, and none for your cooks!" And sorrowfully she retraced her way to the kitchen, bearing the insulted and cooling chicken before her.

"I'll be back in five minutes," called the girl, laughing, and they saw her slender figure through the rose-vines as she sped with twinkling feet toward the gate and down the path across the field.

"Not a very propitious introduction to Mother Leighton," said Lawrence, "but evidently she's used to disappointments of this sort."

The men wandered indoors to the studio, a big, airy room, light and cheerful, and far different from the woman-frescoed den at Lavigne's. A few of Warren's water-color marines still hung on the walls, but there was nothing of the litter of objects that most painters collect about them. The furniture was mostly of willow, cushioned in green, and the curtains and draperies were of light stuffs, all suggestive of an owner of buoyant and youthful spirits.

There was a huge fireplace on the house-side, with a long wicker davenport drawn up in front, and Payne discovered a cupboard with its key in the lock at one side of the chimney. He

opened it, exposing a deep recess, and reaching in, brought forth the materials for a cocktail.

"Here's luck," he exclaimed, "some of Warren's good spirits that he's left with the place. Do you dare ask Mrs. Leighton for a bowl of ice?"

Allan made for the kitchen, and Payne heard him, a moment after, in an exchange of good-natured chaff, in which he, himself, and his artistic temperament were prominently mentioned.

"Well, here's hoping that you do justice to your model," toasted Lawrence. "My, Morton! If you are as clever at mixing color as you are with alcoholics, that sentiment will be superfluous."

They heard a light football on the veranda, and went out, to find Adrea fanning a pair of becomingly pink cheeks with a minute handkerchief.

"Aunt Margaret was not censorious, then, I take it," Payne said, as he placed a chair for her.

"No, indeed, she was quite willing. Mary, who is our cook and general factotum, is very capable and nice, which will give me much more freedom than I expected, thanks to the generosity of my two employers. I had visions of burned chops and scorched fingers for most of the summer. But now we are all beautifully arranged, and I look forward to nothing but joy, and health again for Aunt Margaret. Already she feels the benefit of the clean air and the sun-

shine. She would like to see both of you whenever you can come."

Mrs. Leighton's chicken had not suffered, and the luncheon progressed joyously, with the breeze through the rose-vines sending wafts of perfume across the shaded porch.

Adrea, all gaiety, freed herself at once from any shadow of embarrassment, and before the meal was over, was chattering on, as if with two old friends.

Lawrence was curious as to the attitude Payne would take with her, for Payne was generally somewhat shy in the presence of women he did not know well. He was not at all a woman's man, and Lawrence had wondered whether his relations with the girl were to be the distinctly impersonal kind, such as he generally maintained with his models, or whether she was to be admitted into something nearer his confidence and friendship.

If the former were to be the case, the thought of Lavigne would be disturbing. But if Adrea were allowed to feel that she was welcome, always, not as a mere tool of his profession, but as a companion in the isolation of this somewhat lonely spot, then his doubts for the girl's comfort and peace of mind were to be largely dispelled, for he knew that with his interest even partially aroused, Morton Payne's influence would probably dominate the situation.

"And now, Mr. Payne," Adrea was saying,

with a girlish assumption of a business-like tone, "when are we to begin our work? I feel as if I had a grave responsibility, with two men like you and Mr. Lavigne to keep profitably employed."

"What a hurry you are in, to be sure," Payne replied, looking at her. "One would think the beauties of the country and all out-doors had no attractions for you. Why, there's always plenty of time for work. But there's a lot of rowing to be done, and swimming, and there's Lawrence and his car. No, we can't begin to think about work until—well until we're acclimated at least, and have driven the smoke and dirt of New York out of our minds and our nostrils."

"But I feel that I am doing nothing, now, to deserve all this beauty and freedom and—and—oh, Mr. Payne, I never can thank you for all you have made possible for me. My aunt—Aunt Margaret—was pining away just for this. The doctor said she must have it, and we shouldn't have been able, but for you."

The girl's eyes grew large and bright as she spoke, and Lawrence both saw and felt the sincerity of her impulsive gratitude.

"But my dear child, it wasn't I at all who made it possible. You must save your thanks for Mr. Lavigne. He made all the arrangements—houses, everything. I am simply a favored party to the contract. Besides, no thanks are due from you, in any event. *I* am the favored

one. If you hadn't made posing for me a part of your agreement I never should have come, either. So we're quits on that score."

Adrea shook her head stubbornly. "You can't understand," she said. "If it hadn't been for you there could have been no summer at all."

"Well," laughed Payne, easily, "have it your own way. We won't quarrel over who owes whom, yet awhile, and please don't fret over getting to work. It isn't like building a house, where you work just as long as it doesn't rain, or the material doesn't give out. There are a lot of preliminaries to a big picture—sketches and studies and all that sort of thing, before you get the right start. You mustn't be discouraged, and you mustn't worry. Just enjoy life all you can, and get your Aunt Margaret well enough to come and see us."

Lawrence leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigarette, well satisfied with Payne's speech. He was coming out of his shell, with more grace and rapidity than he had ever known him to come before. Who could have helped it, with this slip of a girl with the big brown eyes and the shining hair, pleading just to be allowed to thank you and do her best for you, and worrying because she was not allowed to begin to earn her pay before you yourself knew how you wanted it earned?

He smiled with pleasure as he saw Adrea unconsciously installing herself in Payne's con-

fidence, as her unaffectedness, and her youth and simplicity began to awaken his sympathies.

Luncheon over, Adrea left the two men to go to her aunt, and an inspection of the house revealed the girl's dainty touch everywhere. A bowl of roses here, a fern by the window, chiffoniers capped with snowy covers, curtains deftly arranged, all showed her hand and her interest.

"That girl has worked her hands off to-day and yesterday," Mrs. Leighton informed them. "I couldn't do anything with her. She dusted, and scrubbed, and ransacked, and stowed away, till I thought I should drop with followin' her orders and directions. I hope you'll be comfortable, sir. Mr. Steinway, Mr. Warren's agent, sir, said I was to stay and do what I could."

"We shall be very comfortable, Mrs. Leighton," said Payne, heartily. "Nothing is lacking, and if your luncheon is a fair sample of what we may expect, we can count ourselves the luckiest of men."

"Thank you, sir," she said, with an old-fashioned curtesy, "but it would have been better if you hadn't waited." And she shot a reproachful glance at Lawrence.

"No disrespect to the chicken, Mrs. Leighton," he replied, "but Miss Varrick's company was certainly worth the depreciation."

"I don't know what that is, Mr. Lawrence, but if it's a compliment to Miss Varrick at my

expense as a cook, it's welcome. She's an angel, sir—no less."

The men wandered out of the house and down to the shore, where a fine sand-beach held out bathing inducements. They inspected the boat-house, finding a gasolene launch and several light rowing-skiffs as well as a fair-sized, yawl-rigged boat, moored off the slip. Wandering along the water's edge, they found themselves soon opposite the cottage occupied by Adrea and her aunt. Payne suggested that they pay their respects.

Accordingly, they climbed the steps that led to the lawn and walked toward the house. Adrea saw them from a window and met them on the porch.

"Aunt Margaret was just wishing you might come," she said. "She is feeling so well to-day."

They went in, and found themselves in a sunny room facing the water.

"This is Mr. Payne, dear, and Mr. Lawrence. I'm sure they will excuse you if you do not rise."

They saw that she was a slight, pale lady, past sixty, with snow-white hair and a gentle manner. Patient suffering had drawn its lines upon her kind, old face, but her lips still smiled, and her eyes lighted up, as she offered each a hand.

"I am glad to see you both," she said, in the quiet, cultured voice of a gentlewoman of the older time. "My niece has been telling me of your arrival. I hope you found your house

ready for you. Nothing seems to me so pathetic as a man, alone in the world, without some woman to keep his house in order. When I was young the keeping of a home was a woman's privilege. Now it seems that it is merely a duty—to be shirked if possible."

"Your niece has been well brought up," said Lawrence. "Her touch shows its magic everywhere."

"I hope, Mr. Payne," said Mrs. Butler, "that all your kindness to my niece and to me will be repaid, at least in part. It would disappoint me greatly if she should be unable to do her share."

Lawrence and Adrea had sauntered out upon the veranda, leaving Payne standing by the window.

"You know she is not a model," she continued, as Payne drew a chair near her, "although she has posed several times for Mr. Duvelle and his pupils. When I first heard of this arrangement I confess I was in grave doubt; for such work is not—not her birthright, Mr. Payne, and she is still only a child. She did not wish to come herself, at first, but when she found that you were to be here also, she pleaded with me to consent. I trust her always, Mr. Payne, and so we came."

Payne, slightly embarrassed, was saved from a reply by Lawrence, who had heard the last of Mrs. Butler's words as he re-entered the room.

"I am glad to hear that you are improving, Mrs. Butler," he said. "By the time Morton

gets down to work in earnest, you will be able to go out, we will hope, and keep Miss Adrea properly in order. It is a very grave business, believe me, sitting for one's portrait."

When they took their leave Payne mentioned that they were all expected at Lavigne's for tea. But Adrea shook her head.

"I can't, this afternoon," she said. "I must give what time I can to my invalid while she needs me most. Good-bye, then, until to-morrow."

"What do you think of her?" asked Lawrence, as they struck across the field.

"Who, the aunt?" asked Payne

"Well, both of them."

"I think I never met a more charming girl or a more delightful old lady," was Payne's reply.

They covered the distance to Lavigne's bungalow slowly, neither apparently being in a hurry for his company. When at last they arrived, they found their host immersed in a litter of papers in the library.

"Go into the studio," he called, as they crossed the open court. "I'll join you in a moment."

They passed through the room to the veranda beyond, and had hardly seated themselves when Lavigne appeared. He had a printed sheet in his hand, and seemed troubled about something.

"Allan," he said after greeting both, "do you know anything about the Enderby Company, the one so many of the fellows at the club are in-

terested in? I've been reading dark hints in some of the financial journals that make me a bit uneasy."

"What sort of hints?" asked Lawrence.

"Oh, I don't know—bad financing, possible receivership, and all that. But I have here a circular letter, signed by the president, Enderby himself, denying the reports, and certainly the stock has been well supported by someone. Every time some Gloomy Gus knocks it down it bounces back, and even goes higher. I don't know what to think."

"Are you in for much?" inquired Payne.

"I don't know what I ought to do," said Lavigne. "I've got about ten thousand dollars in the thing, and I can't afford to lose it, yet everybody says that if it doesn't slump it will be a bonanza in a year or so."

"If I couldn't afford to lose the money, I should sell," said Lawrence, as Lavigne turned to him for his opinion. "The thing may come through all right; but if it goes under, the stock will have practically no value whatever."

"Thanks, Allan, your advice is sound, even if it isn't optimistic. I think I'll sell."

"Never mind," grinned Payne, "if you lose, you can recoup on the grand prize of the Wostenholm—just ten thousand dollars, isn't it?"

"Yes, but with a Salon exhibitor like you in the running, it is as much of a gamble as the other," retorted Lavigne. "To change the sub-

ject, what will you take to drink? Where's little Miss Varrick? She was asked, too, you know."

"Her aunt needed her, I believe," said Payne, "so she asked us to make her excuses."

"Do you know," mused Lavigne, as he cleared a willow table of its load of books and papers, "that aunt, I'm afraid, is going to be rather a nuisance when we get down to work."

"Oh, I don't think so," Payne reassured him. "She is a fine old lady. I am sure she will be considerate. Have you met her?"

"No; I was going over this afternoon, but I've been digging into this Enderby mess, and it was late before I realized it. As long as she's not coming, you won't want tea, I fancy. Allan, long Scotch for you? Morton, what shall it be?"

"I'll take my old stand-by, thank you," said Payne, "dry gin, a lump of sugar and a slice of lemon, fizzed with carbonic, if you have it."

"Why don't you learn to like a decent drink, Mort?" Lawrence inquired. "That's a beach-comber's tipple. You'll have a liver like an old shoe when you're fifty."

"Allan, why does my idiosyncrasy for gin always upset your temper? One would think I drank it like a toper instead of on an average of once a day. I'll wager the insurance companies will be chasing me years after they cease to look even sideways at you, with your whiskies and sodas and your fancy cocktails. What do you say, Lavigne?"

"Correct, said Lavigne, fizzing Payne's drink from a syphon. "By the way, Morton, how are we to arrange it about the girl? Every other day, or three and three? Which would suit you better?"

"I don't know," said Payne, reflecting. "I hadn't thought much; I suppose alternate days would really be more convenient for both of us. Then, if we chose to change off with each other it could be easily done."

"That will suit me perfectly," said Lavigne. "I always like to have a day between to criticize and ponder, especially at the beginning. We'll consider that settled, then, commencing with Monday. Call for first turn!" And he spun a coin in the air.

"Tails," cried Payne, as the bit of silver fell into Lavigne's palm. Tails it was.

The talk grew more general and more desultory, and soon Payne and Lawrence took their leave.

"Come to dinner?" asked Payne, as they left the house.

"No, thanks," Lavigne answered. "I've some letters to write. So long."

"He seemed worried about his investment," remarked Payne, as they strolled homeward. "Ten thousand must be quite a sum to him."

"He'd better sell or he'll lose it," was Lawrence's comment. "Enderby's a crook."

CHAPTER V

ADREA VARRICK

NEARLY a week had passed, and Adrea was giving Payne his third sitting. The morning sun lay on the lawn outside, and the gentle breeze from the Sound stirred the rose-vines that pervaded everything with their subtle incense.

Payne had insisted on beginning early, while the freshness of the day was still in the air and the exhilaration of the morning was upon him. In their previous sittings he had made several studies, without finding exactly the pose he wanted, and to-day he essayed a drawing of her head and shoulders in sepia.

At his request, she wore the simple gown of white in which he had seen her when he first arrived. Its lines clung softly to her slim figure, emphasizing her youth and grace, veiling, yet suggesting the long, sweeping lines of her delicately rounded body, so entirely feminine in its slender charm.

Her hair, with just the suspicion of a parting, sweeping thickly back from a perfectly shaped forehead, was drawn low over the temples, and, hiding the tips of her ears, was thence caught

high on her head in a great, soft mass, seal-brown in the shadow, coruscant copper in the strong light. Thus it revealed that charming curve from nape to crown which no woman who possesses it can ever afford to hide.

A wild-rose at her belt matched the color of her cheeks and the hue of her lips; and, vitalizing and perfecting all, was the deep glory of her brown eyes, that lighted, with their purity and gentleness, a face whose beauty of feature and expression was becoming Payne's great delight, and all too fast his great despair.

He had trifled with her figure, studying its lines and its possibilities, but the more he had gazed, the more he had doubted his ability to do justice to her head. This morning, however, he was determined to try; for success, he knew, could only come after repeated failures.

"A little more to the right, please," he said. "Chin up a bit. No, look over there at that cast. Can you hold it so? Good! We will begin."

He became absorbed in his drawing, which, once begun, grew line upon line with amazing rapidity. She could feel rather than see his quick, firm strokes upon he board, and his keen glances at her as he worked.

The first sketch he tore from the easel and crumpled to destruction. The second was evidently more satisfactory, for he took more pains with the scant detail he was attempting. Finally,

he stopped altogether, studying her long and attentively. He scrubbed out a line here, added a touch there, and dropped his crayon.

"Thank you," he said, smiling. "You hold the pose very well. Does it tire you?"

"No, indeed," she said. "It's such a simple one, just the way I sit, sometimes, when I am thinking—thinking of something pleasant."

"Day-dreams or real thoughts?"

"Real," she said, "that is, as real as I can make them. I have had little time for day-dreaming."

"Would you like to see it?"

Adrea clapped her hands. "Oh, may I? I thought it would be improper to ask. Mr. Lavigne will never show me. He says it is a great secret—that neither of you is to know what the other is doing. But I shall know, surely, because I *am* the picture. Do you think it would be unfair to Mr. Lavigne?"

"Not a bit," replied Payne. "So long as Lavigne isn't allowed to know, there's no reason why you shouldn't see, and criticize, too—all you want to. It will help."

She hopped down from the model-stand and stood in front of the easel. The study was a sepia drawing, life-size, of her head alone. Payne had caught the pose exactly, and so true was it of what he desired to express, that the whole figure, with clasped hands, seated and leaning slightly forward could easily be imagined.

Payne was a perfect draftsman, and his long, sure strokes brought out the outline boldly and without effort. The roundness of the throat, the half-veiled, tender look in the eyes, the sheen of the hair, were all admirably suggested, and the girl drew in a little gasp of breath, as she cried:

"Is that really me? Do I look like that, Mr. Payne?"

"Why, yes," he said, amused. "I've tried, roughly, to get the main points. Of course, there's no real work in it. It is merely a first impression, just a feeling, you understand. I shall have to make a lot of them before I am satisfied. This has a good many faults. That line of the chin is too square, and the left ear is altogether too low. The drawing part is simple enough. I never have trouble with that. It is the expression that is hard to catch. Whether it depends altogether on myself, I don't know. It must be there, in your face, and it is up to me to find it. I know what I want, but it is elusive. Sometimes, as I look at you, I think I see it; then, when I try to draw, it is suddenly gone. My imagination isn't firm enough. It gets away from me, somehow."

"Then that must be a sign," said Adrea, greatly interested, "that there is something lacking in me—something you thought I possessed, and which, in reality, I have not."

She spoke in a troubled voice, and Payne, see-

ing that she was taking him too seriously, hastened to reassure her.

"No, no, it isn't that. It isn't you. The trouble is here, inside my own head. I shall remedy it, and in the meantime I shall watch you all I can, if you don't mind, so that the fleeting glimpses of the thing I am after may make a deeper and a deeper impression. Then, after a while, I shall have it fast, and we can begin in earnest."

"You are very kind to be so patient with me," she said. "Perhaps, if I knew what it is you wish me to express——"

"You mustn't think of it. You can't *arrange* any expression that will be what I want. Please, please, don't try anything of that sort. It would ruin my chances. All I want is you, yourself, just as you are, and as happy and untroubled as you can be. Will you promise to be happy?"

"Oh, Mr. Payne, how could I be anything else? It is so beautiful here, everything, and you are so good with me and ——"

"There, there, child," laughed Payne, "we mustn't be serious on a morning like this. Everything about will be laughing at us. See that humming-bird on the veranda. He is laughing, now. Come, let's go outside and pick the roses."

In the bright sunshine Adrea at once recovered her spirits, and picked and picked until her arms could hold no more. Then, after giving the great heap of blooms into the care of Mrs. Leigh-

ton, they wandered down to the shore and sat on a shady seat overlooking the water.

"Do you know," she said, leaning comfortably back against the rough bark of a great white birch, around the trunk of which the seat was built, "this is the first time since I was a little girl that I have had a real taste of the country and the big out-of-doors?"

"You poor child," sympathized Payne, "then you have lived in New York all your life? How awful!"

"No, not all my life. I was born in the Middle West, but I was taken to New York when I was nothing but a baby; so I remember nothing else."

"And your people?" asked Payne.

The girl hesitated. "Yes," she said, "I must tell you about them."

"Please," interrupted Payne, detecting a little somber note in her voice, "if it will pain you, don't."

"No, not at all. I should like you to know about me."

She looked up at him with her frank eyes, and seeing the kindness and interest in his face, went on.

"I never knew my father," she said, simply. "I do not even know his name."

The statement came from her quietly—so quietly that its effect was the greater for her manner of saying it. She did not see the look of pity that shot into Payne's eyes, and continued speaking.

"My mother died when I was only three, and the only faint, dim memory I have of her is of a sweet-faced, sad woman, who used to rock me to sleep in her arms, and pray for me. What little I know, Aunt Margaret has told me. My father and mother met and were married all in a week. He was a man of the big, Western type, and he was so busy doing the things that have made that country out there what it is, that he had no time for his wife.

"I never knew what happened. It must have been something very terrible for my mother to have left him, as she did, in less than a year. She never saw him again, and when I was born she went with me to Aunt Margaret's home in New York.

"She never was well again, and when she died she made Aunt Margaret promise never to tell me who my father was. Her last prayer was that I might never try to find out. She left a sealed packet with some papers and her marriage certificate with a trust company; but I must never open it unless I should, sometime, need to prove exactly who I am. I was christened Adrea, for my mother. Varrick was her maiden name, which she took back after the court had given her her divorce. Mrs. Varrick, she was called."

Adrea stopped, as if there was no more to tell. Payne had been watching her closely throughout the recital, wondering at her directness in its

telling, and at the innocence that had prompted her to confide in him. He felt, somehow, that he had been honored by her trust, and he took off his hat and laid it down on the seat between them before he spoke.

"Adrea—you *will* let me call you that, won't you?—you have paid me a high compliment just now. Why did you do it? You surely do not go about telling people your story. Why did you tell me?"

"Why," she said, looking at him again, and reading the same sympathy in his eyes, "I—I just felt that I wanted you to know. I *had* to tell you."

"And have you never wanted to know the name of your father?" Payne asked.

"Yes, once, when I was growing up, it occurred to me that I really ought to be told, and I asked Aunt Margaret about him. Then she told me of my mother's great desire that I should not know, and how, from the day I was born, half a year after she had left him—escaped, was the word Aunt Margaret used—she had never even spoken his name. Aunt Margaret, herself, even may not know it, for it was a sudden elopement, and the family at home had tried to keep it a secret, they felt so badly.

"I wanted to know what dreadful thing my father had done, but she would not tell me, and I saw it was no use to keep on. One thing I did learn, was that my father never knew he was to

have a child. I have often wondered if knowing it might have made a difference with him—if perhaps it might have kept them together. But I shall never know, of course."

"And your mother?" asked Payne. "Can you remember anything more about her? What she looked like?"

"No, I was so very young when she left us, that I can't remember much; but Aunt Margaret says that whenever I wish to see her as she was at my age, I have only to look in the mirror, and she will be there, smiling at me."

"And so you are all alone in the world—you and your aunt? Have you no one else?"

"No, no one. We have gotten on very well, though, just we two. Aunt Margaret's husband died soon after my mother, and left very little property; but it was enough, with what my mother had from her own people, and I was able to go to school like other girls. I even went to a finishing school for a year. Then came Aunt Margaret's illness, and that took a great deal of our money. She has not been well since, and I thought I ought to be earning instead of spending, so I have tried to do what I could. Mr. Duvelle gave me a place because his daughter, Joan, was one of my music pupils."

"Oh, so you are a musician!" cried Payne in surprise, "quite an independent and wonderful young person. What kind of music?"

"I teach the piano, but for my own pleasure

I always turn to my violin. I couldn't live without that. It's such company. and such a comfort."

"You have it here, of course," said Payne, eagerly. "Will you play for me?"

"Gladly," said the girl. "At any time."

"Now, then," decided Payne. "Please, I should love it."

Adrea's lashes swept down, hiding her eyes from him.

"Very well, now if you like," she said, and the color of the very rose at her breast climbed swiftly to her cheeks.

"Shall we go to the cottage, or do you prefer the studio?"

'You shall choose," he said.

"The studio, then, I think. Aunt Margaret may be resting. She did not sleep well last night. The air, she says, is so bracing, and she has not yet become accustomed to it."

With a bright nod, she tripped off down the shore path, and Payne sought the studio to await her return.

He had scarcely reached the house, it seemed to him, before he heard the quick, light patter of her feet on the long veranda, and she stood before him in the doorway. She had her violin under her arm, and caressed its strings with the fingers of her slim, firm hand as if they were too anxious for their pleasure to be still. There was eagerness in the girl's eyes as she crossed the room.

"I haven't played for nearly a week," she said, "and I shall probably be a little fluttery at first. I have seldom played for people."

Payne sank back, easily, in one of the big chairs. "You are to forget me entirely," he said. "Play for yourself, not for me."

He half-closed his eyes, and she nestled the instrument lovingly in the soft hollow of her neck. "What shall I play?" she asked.

But before he could reply she had touched the strings with her bow, and there arose from them the first sweet strains of that exquisite, elusive melody, MacDowell's "To a Wild Rose." They swelled into the wonderful harmonies and plaintive pathos of the delicate motif, seeming to fill the room with a mystical perfume, sweeter, even, than the breath of the growing roses outside.

The firmness of her touch, the sympathy of her expression, the refinement of her execution, effortless, unstudied and free as a bird's song, all combined to make her interpretation one of wonderful perfection, and when the last note died, as mystically as the first had come, Payne felt himself brought into closer touch with her gentle soul, closer, even, than when she had been telling the pathetic little story of her life.

He remained as he was for a moment, with his eyes closed, breathing in the last incense of the song. He had always loved it; but now it would ever have a new meaning for him. With each note, as long as he lived, he felt, he would

see again, no matter where he might be, the figure of a young girl in white, with a wild rose caressing her breast, drawing and redrawing, with long, sure strokes, the bow of her beloved violin, that nestled in the sweet hollow of her neck as though it were glad to be her close companion.

He opened his eyes to find her standing there, looking at him, her own eyes bright and wide, and a little wistful.

"Why did you choose that, Adrea?" he asked.

"I don't know; because I love it so, I suppose. Do you like it?"

"I have always loved it," he answered. "Your playing is exquisite, wonderful. Who taught you to play like that?"

"It was Herr Kinderfreund," she said.

"Not Kinderfreund of the Philharmonic?"

"Yes, the great Kinderfreund. He lived near us for years, and often came to our house to smoke his great china pipe, when I was a little girl. When I grew old enough to hold a bow, he began to teach me, just for the love of it. It would be something for me to remember him by, he said. Dear old man, he was well named, *Kinderfreund.*"

"He must have been proud of you," said Payne, with admiration plainly showing in his voice. "You could have the world at your feet with the art you possess. Why are you here, helping a poor painter like me to make a

picture? You ought to be hearing the applause of the music-lovers of all the world instead of hiding yourself like this. Did Kinderfreund never tell you you would make a great player?"

"No, not exactly that. He used to praise me, but he never suggested my playing in public. He always shrugged at the concert stage for a woman."

"Perhaps he loved you so much that he kept you as his secret. I do not wonder that he did. He knew, you see, what sort of life a girl must lead who sells her art for money."

Payne rose. "Come in here," he said, "and play it again for me."

Adrea followed him to the long east room, which opened out of the studio. Payne approached a baby-grand piano that stood at the farther end, and raised the lid.

"Oh," she cried, "do you play?"

"A little," he admitted; "perhaps I can keep in touch with you, though I'm a bit rusty, I expect. Shall we try?"

"With all my heart," she said, simply. "Isn't it delightful, this getting acquainted and finding out such surprising things about each other. But I might have known you played."

Payne, without replying, struck the opening chords of the accompaniment, and they began the melody together, the piano enhancing and bringing out new beauties of harmony, the sweet, high notes of the violin, true and round, filling the long, low room with the fragrance of their sound.

They were just finishing the last strain when a foot-fall sounded, and Payne looked up to see Lavigne entering. Adrea's last note quavered and broke, suddenly, as if a discord had been struck, and she felt, vaguely, a sense of disquietude, as if the music she loved had been almost profaned by the intrusion.

"Given up painting for music?" Lavigne asked, by way of greeting. "It had a very entrancing sound as I came up the path. I didn't know you were musical, Miss Adrea."

She made no reply, and Lavigne turned to Payne. "I'm on my way to the Inlet to post some letters. Would you two care to go along? If not, I will take anything you have."

Payne looked at his watch. "No, I think I won't," he said. "It's nearly lunch time, and Mrs. Leighton, you know, is particular. There's a letter on the hall table that you might take, if you don't mind."

"All right," said Lavigne, "then I won't interrupt your musicale any longer. Have you any letters, Miss Adrea?"

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Lavigne," she said, turning over some music at the piano. She was glad he was not staying.

Payne, returning, found Adrea loosening her bow and preparing to go home. "Can't I induce you to stay and have lunch with me?" he said. "It's lonely when Lawrence isn't here."

"I should love to if it weren't for Aunt Mar-

garet," she returned. "It *must* be lonely for you. Perhaps by next week she will be able to come over too, sometimes, if you would like to have us."

"Above all things," Payne replied, heartily.

Picking up a great bunch of the roses she had gathered earlier in the morning, he placed them in her arms.

"Take these to her. She will like them."

When Adrea was gone, Payne returned to the studio, and taking up the study of the girl's head, which he had made in the morning, he gazed at it, long and earnestly. It was a poor thing, it seemed to him, in the light of his new knowledge of Adrea Varrick. The insight he had been given into the simple sweetness of the girl's character, had made, perhaps, a more profound impression than he knew.

He closed his eyes, and saw her again, as she had stood before him, playing, the light coming and going in her brown eyes, her easily-poised figure bending and swaying to the rhythm of the full-sweeping bow, and he wondered if he should ever be able to put on canvas the true portrait of her, so unaffected, so frank, and so altogether beautiful.

For the first time in his life he found himself doubting his ability to perform that which he had decided to attempt. He wondered at it; for loss of confidence was strange and new to him. His hand had not lost its cunning; of that he felt sure. He could reproduce face and form,

line for line, with unerring correctness; but could he put into the face that deep, human quality of character, of personality, which would stamp the work with the mark of utter truth?

He sighed and laid the rough sketch down. He did not know.

CHAPTER VI

TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS

IT was early in the following week, and Adrea was posing for Lavigne.

At previous sittings he had drawn and redrawn her many times, as if seeking for some effect that was constantly eluding him. He had changed her pose on each occasion, which had puzzled the girl more or less, as he had given her to understand, at the time the arrangement was brought about, that he had entirely settled the composition of his picture in his own mind, and only needed a proper model to begin at once.

However, she did not concern herself with this. It was only when he had asked her to wear a gown, which he produced, and to change the arrangement of her hair, that she felt a touch of curiosity.

The gown was a somewhat elaborate evening frock of pale yellow, cut low, and much bespangled. With it he had suggested a low coiffure, which did not please her, and which, when she finally accomplished it to suit him, startled her by the hard effect it gave her face. Still, she did not object, and offered nothing in the way of comment.

And Lavigne explained nothing. Neither did he allow her to see any of the preliminary studies he made. He had explained to her in the beginning the nature of the compact of secrecy that he and Payne had made, so that this did not seem strange, though she could hardly understand why she, his model, should not be allowed to see his work.

Lavigne was not so sure a draftsman as the other, and his method was quite different, though she knew from the work that covered the walls of the studio, that, in final effect, he was the equal, if not the superior of Payne.

On this particular morning Lavigne seemed, at last, to have found himself. He posed her without hesitancy in an entirely new position, of which she was very glad, since some of the others had been difficult to hold, and Lavigne when at work was often forgetful of his model's endurance.

It was very simple. She was seated in a high-backed chair of antique black oak, not leaning back, but lightly poised as if expectant. Her head was raised, the eyes looking straight ahead, as if she saw someone coming toward her. One hand rested on the arm of the chair, the fingers tense, while the other held a fan, half closed.

The pose seemed conventional, and Adrea was puzzled to know why he had chosen it from among the many others he had tried. She watched him as he rapidly blocked in the outline of a three-quarter figure. He glanced up at her

from time to time, smiling half to himself, and talking as he worked.

"I believe we have it at last, Miss Adrea," he said, as he dropped his charcoal and stood back, squinting at the canvas. "I thought it all out last night and I believe it will do admirably. Now, as this is to be a sort of an idealized portrait, I shall have to depend upon you to remember, if you can, the exact manner of holding yourself. The poise of the head is rather important, at the beginning, and as you are not an old hand it may be rather difficult for you to fall into it at will."

"I'll try, of course," she replied, "but it seems to me it might be easier if I could have some fixed object to look at, each time, which would naturally bring the head pose into the proper angle."

"Yes," said Lavigne, agreeing, "perhaps it would." And going to the wall he took down the painting of "The Betrothal," which Lawrence had so severely criticized, and hung it opposite Adrea's chair.

"There!" he said. "That will do, admirably."

She had noticed the picture several times, and had disliked it. When she saw him taking it down she made an involuntary movement, as if to ask him to choose another, but reflecting that it might seem a little queer for her to object, she said nothing. She had seen in the picture the same subtle suggestion of which Lawrence

had spoken; the hard look of worldly triumph on the young girl's face, as, half smiling to herself, she gazed down at the ring which her *fiancé* had just left upon her hand.

"Is the light good there?" asked Lavigne, as he stepped back. "Can you see the picture well?"

"Oh, yes, quite well, only——"

She bit her lip as she checked the words that came involuntarily to her lips.

"Only—what?" he asked.

"Nothing. I was wondering whether having it as a *vis-à-vis* for a long time would make me grow to like it better."

"You don't care for it?" asked Lavigne, apparently in pained surprise. "I'm afraid I have nothing better to offer. I have always considered it the best bit of work I have done. However, if you really object I will take it away."

"No, indeed, perhaps I shall grow to appreciate it better," she hurriedly said, fearing that her implied criticism had hurt him.

"Perhaps I have gotten a wrong impression. I have never looked at it carefully before."

Lavigne said no more, and went back to his easel, correcting, and adding to the charcoal study. Once she met his odd, greenish eyes as he glanced keenly at her, and there was a look in them that she liked even less than she did the picture. They seemed to hold something of the same quality that he had painted into those of the young girl.

He worked steadily for an hour, and then announced that he would do no more that morning. He seemed well satisfied with the progress he had made, and as she rose from her chair he quickly dropped the scarf that hid the canvas from view.

Adrea went at once to the robing room, just off the studio, and slipped out of the garish evening gown into her own simple frock. She shook down her hair and arranged it again in her own fashion, and prepared to depart. Lavigne was standing in the center of the studio smoking a cigarette when she re-entered.

"Won't you rest a few moments?" he asked. "You really must be rather tired, holding that stiff pose so long."

There really was no reason why she should refuse, except the promptings of a growing dislike for the man, and half-willingly she allowed him to lead the way to the veranda.

"May I offer you some sort of a drink?" he asked. "It's so very warm this morning. Not a glass of lemonade even? Yes, that is sensible. I should like one too."

He disappeared, and she sank down on the swinging seat. As she glanced about the covered porch, the bright colors of a magazine caught her eye, and she took up the French paper with the *risqué* cover which Lawrence had seen. .She noticed at once, as he had, the half-hidden initials "J. L." in the border, and immediately divined

who had drawn the design. She laid it down with a feeling of disgust, and turned toward the broad sweep of the Sound, that glittered silver and blue in the near distance.

Lavigne returned with two long glasses that tinkled alluringly. His eye caught the magazine on the table, and in a pretense of clearing a place for the tray he whisked it out of sight.

"I want you to pledge me success in our undertaking, Miss Adrea," he said, as he threw himself into a lounge-chair near her. "We have made a good start this morning, and it means a great deal to me. Will you wish me luck?"

"Of course," she replied, seriously. "I naturally should want you to succeed, shouldn't I, since I am such an interested party?"

"Then here's to fortune, and the *grand prix* of the Wostenholm," cried Lavigne with a laugh, raising his glass on high.

"The Wostenholm!" repeated the girl. "It is to be *the* exhibition of the season, isn't it?"

"It is to be the exhibition of many seasons," he answered. "Nothing but American work done in America can compete under the terms of the endowment, which is a mighty good thing for us fellows; but the trouble is that a lot of the men who have made good abroad—many of the new ones, like Payne, and some of the old hands—are flocking over here to have a try for it; so there is likely to be a wild scramble and not a few sore heads among those who do not

even have their pictures hung. But for all that, I should say that the big prize lies between a scant dozen men."

"And you are really going to try for it, and with me, just poor little me as your subject?" she asked, a little excited in spite of herself at the thought of her responsibilities.

"Yes, of course. It's worth trying for. Ten thousand dollars doesn't grow on every bush in these days of biting competition. Then, to the man who wins there may be other plums. Old Man Wostenholm, they say, is very generous with those whose work pleases him, and it might mean a commission or two, and perhaps a good sale for the prize painting."

"Who is Mr. Wostenholm?" asked the girl, now really interested.

"Why," said Lavigne, "he is a disgustingly rich old chap, a widower with no children, who has gone in for Art with a capital A. The Lord knows where he ever picked up his appreciation for good things; but they say his taste is, instinctively, for nothing poorer than the best.

"His collection is one of the finest in America and he is rapidly robbing Europe of some of her rarest treasures. He is really a most interesting character, self-made and all that, you know—got his money in railroads and mines and water-powers—and he's not at all stingy with it when he sees what he wants. In short, he's a patron worth working and waiting for."

The eagerness with which Lavigne spoke of the financial benefits that might accrue to the prize-winner gave Adrea a new thought in her rapidly-forming estimate of the man.

Heretofore, she had thought him an artist with serious ambitions and ideals, who was expending his best effort on their fulfilment; but now he had turned on the light, and she realized that here was no artist at all, in the best sense of the word, but a clever workman, who was ready to stultify himself in his mean endeavor to catch the eye of a wealthy patron—to pander to his own greed.

And, moreover, he was using her to that end. Adrea had never liked Lavigne, and from the first, though she had no reason for it except her native intuition, she had felt a vague distrust of him. She had, up to this time, given him what respect she could, but now even this vanished, and she had a feeling that in continuing to pose for this picture, which he was to paint in his effort to mark down a millionaire's dollars, she was losing something of her own self-respect.

Still, she considered, it was he, in the beginning, who had made it possible for her to escape from the roar and heat of the city, and to bring her aunt to this lovely spot, where she might rest and win back the old-time strength and health.

She compared, half unconsciously, as Lavigne talked on, the sordid aspiration of the man with the clean, lofty ideals of Morton Payne; and

even the fresh, pure air of the Sound breeze seemed to become less fresh as it flowed into this man's presence.

She hastily finished her drink and rose to go. Lavigne walked with her to the outer door, and she feared he would offer to accompany her home or as far as Payne's. But he did not, and as she walked down the drive to the gate, she could feel the gaze of those gray-green, unequal eyes devouring her from behind. Involuntarily she shrugged and hurried on.

As she passed Payne's gate, he hailed her from the porch and came running down the walk.

"Good morning, Adrea; you've had a rather long session, haven't you? I've been watching for you this half-hour. I have to go to the village for some supplies and I want company, will you go?"

"It's very flattering to be watched for, I suppose," she answered, "but isn't it rather a good distance before luncheon?"

"No, indeed; we'll go over in the motor-boat. I've been grooming her all the morning, and she's like a horse at the barrier, waiting to be off. If you like, we'll stop at your cottage, so Aunt Margaret won't be anxious. Do come."

Adrea promptly consented, and as they walked down to the boat-house, and she noted Payne's free stride and his open, boyish frankness, she compared him, and not to his discredit, with the man she had just left.

"I suppose it's permissible to ask how my fellow craftsman's picture is coming on," Payne said as he saw her comfortably settled on the boat's cushions.

"Oh, yes, you may go as far as that, I think. We seemed to progress well this morning. Mr. Lavigne thinks he has the right pose at last, and is impatient to begin real work."

"That's good," was Payne's unqualified approval. "That's ahead of us, isn't it? We shall have to stop our vacillating and settle down, too."

He started the engine, and with a churning at the stern the little craft shot out from its shelter and sped up the inlet.

The rush through the water and the cool air, blowing against her cheeks and playing havoc with her hair, seemed to banish the unpleasantness of the morning, and Adrea was chatting gaily as the boat curved inshore and came to a gliding pause at the foot of her own lawn.

"I won't be a minute," she cried, leaping out and speeding toward the house, and Payne, standing in the cockpit, looking after her, said to himself:

"By George, who could help being a painter with her about—and as good as she is beautiful?"

He sighed without in the least meaning to, and suddenly sat down. What could that mean?

The run to the head of the inlet, where the village of Fairhaven basked sleepily in the noon-

day sun, was made in quick time, and Payne and Adrea ascended upon the two stores the place maintained, with Mrs. Leighton's list of necessaries. While the packages were being carried to the boat, Payne bought a New York paper of the day before.

Adrea, who had been making a few purchases for herself, found him sitting on the platform in front of the store, absorbed in the financial page. He looked up as she came out.

"Jove! This is hard luck!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" she asked, seeing the serious look in his eyes.

"The Enderby Company—it's gone up."

"And did you have money invested in it?" she asked, with quick sympathy in her voice.

"No, but Lavigne did. Ten thousand dollars! Poor chap, I'm afraid he'll lose it all."

"I'm so sorry," she sympathized, forgetting in a moment her dislike of the man in her realization of his loss, for such a sum seemed like a fortune to her.

"I suppose he can not afford to lose it?"

"Indeed, he cannot," Payne replied; "but perhaps he hasn't lost it, after all. We were speaking of this very concern the other day, when Lawrence was here. Allan advised him to sell, and he said he should. I know he wrote to his brokers the next day, for he had the letter with him when he called at the house. I hope he did sell. This would hit him hard."

On the way home in the launch, Adrea and Payne again talked of Lavigne and his trouble.

"He is a hard worker," Payne declared, "but he never seems to get on. Of course, he sells a picture now and then, and he has done fairly well at the exhibitions; but there seems to be something about his things that hoodoos them in the eye of the average picture buyer.

"He does beautiful work, that is, technic, and effect, and all that sort of thing; but since I've come to know him better there's something queer about the man that I can't exactly fathom. There's some strange twist of character, not eccentricity exactly, but a certain contrariness that militates against success. I think he knows it, too, but instead of trying to overcome it he rather clings to it, and fosters it, as a sort of conscious individuality.

"One would hardly care to tell him the truth, and when he hears criticisms of his things that ought to show him his faults, he actually glories in them. Some of his women are really brutal in a subtle kind of way."

"I think I know exactly what you mean," said Adrea. "I've noticed it, too. There is a picture that he has hung as a target for my head pose, which is that way. I can't bear it, but he is so evidently proud and fond of it that I can't very well object."

They reached the boat-house, and Payne made the craft snug.

"I suppose Lavigne ought to know about this," he said. "Shall we go over and break it to him?"

"I think it would be better for you to go alone," Adrea decided. "He might think it a bit queer to find me knowing about his affairs. But if you think best you may give him my sympathy."

Payne stuffed the paper in his coat pocket and walked to the bungalow. Lavigne was lounging on the veranda as he came in, and at once rose and offered him a drink.

"Thanks," said Payne, "it *is* rather warm, isn't it?" He threw himself down on the swinging couch, wondering how best to approach his unpleasant subject.

Lavigne came, bringing tall, frosty glasses and the two took their first sips in silence. Lavigne himself opened the way.

"I wonder what New York is doing," he said, yawning, "I haven't seen a paper for two days. I suppose I ought to be keeping track of that Enderby mess, but things are so peaceful down here that it's hard to get down and grovel through the stock-market reports."

"You didn't sell, then?" asked Payne, futilely, for he knew he had not.

"No," answered Lavigne slowly. "Allan, you remember, advised me to get out, but I didn't. I thought the chances were even for them to pull through."

Payne slowly pulled the paper from his pocket.

Something in his face must have told Lavigne what was coming, for the man's eyes set in a fixed stare at the sheet he held toward him, and his cheeks turned to a sickly yellow as his dark skin blanched.

"You don't mean—! For God's sake, man, Enderby hasn't gone under?"

He clutched the paper with a hand that shook, and scanned its columns half-seeingly.

"Here," said Payne, placing his finger on the article. "I'm sorry, Lavigne, but perhaps the receivers can pull them out. I see there are some assets, and a prospect of more."

"They can't pull out," groaned Lavigne. "It's my luck. Nothing ever pulls out for me. Ten thousand dollars! Gone, swept away, absolutely gone!"

He dropped the paper and sunk his head between his two hands.

"Come, come, old chap, you mustn't take it so hard, you know, you've something left, haven't you? And you have your two hands, and the biggest opportunity you, or I, or any of us have ever had. Why, you can *win*, Lavigne, if you try."

"Win!" cried Lavigne, starting up and clenching his hands. "How can I win? Do I ever win,—at anything? No, I don't. There's some devilish curse on me and everything I touch. If I paint a picture I can't sell it, even if it's a medal winner. It's fate!" And he sank back again.

"Lavigne," Payne said, rising and pacing slowly up and down the veranda, "I'm sorry, deeply sorry, but I'm going to talk to you straight, for once. You may not like what I say, but it will be the truth. I'm going to tell you why people don't buy your pictures. It's not my opinion alone that I'm giving you. It's more or less universal. Allan has seen it, and so have others, and spoken of it.

"You are either naturally or intentionally, a misanthrope. You always see a shady side, and you have either fostered it, or you have not tried to overcome it. You paint portraits and figure-pictures, and you are known for the psychologic quality you put into them. You have that quality; but the trouble is that it is mostly in your own imagination—not in your subject. You don't paint *true*.

"When you make a portrait, you see things—things that are not, and could never be in the face you are painting. I don't know whether you wish to deliberately falsify your model, but you do it, consciously or unconsciously.

"Look at the portrait of that young girl, the one you call 'The Betrothal'. I know that girl, and I would stake my life that she never thought, and never was capable of thinking the thoughts you have put into her face. That is why her family wouldn't take the picture.

"And you knew it, didn't you?" Payne demanded, pausing in his stride and facing Lavigne.

"Why did you do it? Was it amusing for you to make a caricature of that girl's soul before the world? Why did you do it? Possibly you don't know why yourself. Perhaps you thought you saw the things you painted there. But that sort of thing, I tell you, Lavigne, doesn't go. People know. They can see. You can't fool them with a painter's trick. That is why your studio is always like a gallery. That is why you can't sell your pictures."

If Lavigne heard the arraignment he gave no sign, but sat as he was, his head between his hands, staring at the floor. Payne, puzzled, thought that possibly he had said too much, and was about to lay his hand on the other's shoulder when he started up.

"God, Payne," he said, "this is no time to talk shop. I must go to town." He fumbled at his watch. "One o'clock," he muttered. "Train goes at two, and it's three miles to the station."

"I can save you nearly half the distance in the motor-boat, and you can get someone at the village to drive you over. Had lunch?"

"No," said Lavigne, "never mind, I shan't want any. Ten thousand dollars! And I might have sold out three days ago at a profit! Must I always be a fool?"

He hurried into his sleeping-room and reappeared with a hand-bag.

"I'll accept your offer of a lift," he said. "Shall we start?"

He turned aside in the court to speak to his servant, and rejoined Payne on the walk.

Adrea, from the porch of her cottage, saw the two men flash by in the fast craft, and waved her handkerchief at them. When Payne returned he stopped at the foot of her lawn, and, mooring his boat, came up the grassy slope.

"Poor Lavigne," he said, as she came out to greet him. "He's badly hit and is taking it hard. He has gone to New York to see his brokers. I'm afraid I shall have to do the same in the morning."

"But I thought you had nothing in this company," said Adrea in surprise.

"I haven't, but you see this is a pretty big failure, and other things may be affected, so it's best to be on the watch and keep out of trouble. So with both of us away you will have a day or two to yourself."

"But you're not to be gone long," she said, a little anxiously.

"Only for the day I hope. You won't be nervous, alone on the Point?"

"No, I think not," she smiled, "though it may be a bit lonely. May I pick the roses as usual?"

"To be sure. And if your aunt is able, you might take her over to watch you. It would be a change for her."

She thanked him, and they saw no more of each other that day.

In the morning she heard a carriage from the village rumble by before she was thoroughly awake, and later, while she was dressing, she saw him on his way to the train. He looked out as he passed the house.

CHAPTER VII

WHOSE LETTER?

WITH its clattering, clanging rush, its heat, and smoke, and dust, and its jostling millions of busy people, the city greeted Payne ill-temperedly.

From the station, he drove in a taxicab directly to Lawrence's office; but Allan was engaged with a client, and could not see him for an hour or more. Leaving word that he would lunch at the club at one, Payne joined the hurried throng of lower Broadway, and walked to a big building near the Battery where were located the offices of Franklin and Hedge, his brokers.

He had been more anxious since the Enderby explosion than he cared to admit, even to himself, and it was with some trepidation that he stepped into the customers' room to glance at the quotations on the board. The stock in which he was interested had shown, in common with a long list of others, the effects of the failure, but on the whole it seemed to be holding up well.

Franklin he found at his desk, mechanically signing endless stock certificates. He looked up as Payne approached the railing, and motioned him to a chair.

"Hello, Morton," he said, "be through in a minute. This looks important but it's not. Go ahead and talk. What's the trouble? You look worried."

"How's the Enderby smash going to affect things, Ned?"

Franklin looked up, with his pen poised. "You weren't in that, were you? he asked, quickly. "Because if you were, you might as well kiss it good-bye. It was a rotten failure."

"I didn't have any Enderby," Payne replied, "but how about the other things, Scotia and Southwestern Smelting?"

"Smelting is all right, but Scotia is rather shaky. If I were you I would let that go. How much have you got?"

"Five hundred."

"Whew," Franklin whistled, and picked up the ticker-tape at his elbow. "Fifty and an eighth, forty nine, forty-eight and a half, three hundred at forty-eight. Going down like a stick —no support at all. The Lord knows where it will stop. I'd jump in and dump the lot if I were you."

He reached for a selling-pad and touched a desk button.

"What do you say?"

"Sell," said Payne. "You know best."

Franklin scribbled the order and handed it to a boy, who seemed to appear from nowhere. "Hustle it," he commanded briefly, and sat

back and looked at Payne. "What did you hold it at?" he inquired.

"Fifty-six, I think."

"You're lucky to get off that easy, Mort, I shouldn't be surprised to see it at twenty before closing. It's one of those things without any real backbone—one of the kind that a big failure like this always subjects to the weeding out process—merely a gamble at best. It's the sort of thing your sort never ought to touch, but just the sort your sort always does touch."

He offered cigarettes, and Payne smoked until the boy returned with a sale slip.

"Forty-seven and an eighth," read Franklin. "You're well out of it my boy. Don't do it again."

Asking Franklin to mail his check to the club, Payne departed, nearly five thousand dollars poorer in pocket, and with a doubtful balance on the side of experience. It made him feel cheap, somehow, to have been caught by Franklin, dabbling in shaky securities of the "Scotia" class, and while the loss of the money would not cripple him appreciably, he felt the ignominy of being shorn like any other lamb of the flock.

He took the elevator, and on the ground-floor met Lavigne. The man's face seemed sharper and yellower than ever, and the queer inequality in his eyes more apparent.

"How goes it, Lavigne?" Payne called, as the other was about to take an ascending car.

Lavigne paused. "Hello, Mort," he said, "I didn't expect to find you, though I've met almost everyone else I know."

"Oh, we're all frisking in the same pasture," said Payne, grimly; "all led to the shearing through the same lane."

"You don't mean to say you were caught, too!" exclaimed Lavigne. "Why, you said nothing at the Inlet about having any Enderby."

"I had none," Payne replied, "but I had some Scotia shares that I've just dropped a neat bundle on, because of it."

Lavigne looked at him sharply, but said nothing, and Payne did not mention the amount of his loss.

This news was not at all to Lavigne's liking. While he knew Payne was fairly well off in worldly goods, he was so absorbed in his own losses that his imagination did not hesitate to place his fellow-sufferer in the same general predicament as himself, at least so far as effect was concerned.

At once he saw Payne also striving to recoup with redoubled effort in the struggle for the great prize of the Wostenholm. Heretofore, he had seen in him an easy-going type of worker, never very serious about his ambitions, and content with the quiet commendation of his friends, with here and there a sale.

Now, he viewed him differently. He knew that Payne possessed a latent ability that sooner or later would be aroused, and would make him

famous. This, then, the great money-prize, would be the incentive, and with both working from the same model, one picture must act as a foil upon the other, throwing into bold relief the faults and virtues of each, thus jeopardizing the chances of the poorer artist, who, alone, without a rival canvas offered for comparison, might cover his faults with some hope of success.

An efflux of humanity from a descending elevator bore the two men apart, and waving a hand above the heads of the crowd, Payne left the building.

When Lavigne reached the office of his broker, he went to the ticker and noted that Scotia, quoted at forty and a half, was still going down. As he was aware that the stock had been selling above sixty before the Enderby failure, Payne's loss was magnified to the maximum, and his disturbance of mind increased. That neither he nor Payne might be of prize-winning caliber did not seem to occur to him.

Payne, on leaving the building, had jumped aboard a surface car and was well on his way uptown. At Madison Square he changed to a Fifth Avenue 'bus, and climbed to the top, for the air of the city's canyons was stifling. He found the club deserted, but fairly cool, and dropped into a chair by a window to await Lawrence's coming.

As he sat in the big, empty room, gazing absently at the sunlit street below, with its never-

ending procession of carriages, motor-cars, and people on foot, who dodged the street traffic, perspiring, hurrying or sauntering according to the business in hand, a feeling of loneliness stole upon him. For the moment he was a spectator of the show, looking out upon the city's life as at a moving picture on a screen, and there was a sense of aloofness, such as everyone must sometimes feel when in the presence of a multitude of people whose springs of action he cannot see.

The purposefulness of some, the purposelessness of others, but each moved by some all-controlling impulse, made a mystery of the throng, unreadable, unsolvable. It was like watching some great game, the rules of which he did not know, and Payne turned from the window and rose.

Touching a button, he reseated himself at a table and picked up a magazine.

"You rang, sir?"

Payne looked up to find the excellent Peters at his elbow.

"Mr. Lawrence and myself will lunch here, Peters," he said. "I will leave the selection to you. Make it something seasonable and simple. I expect Mr. Lawrence at one."

The servant departed, and Payne dropped his magazine with a short sigh. The giving of his luncheon order seemed somehow to awaken a new train of thought, which began with the night he and Allan had dined there under Peters' supervision, hardly two weeks before.

Along this line the course was not far to Adrea, and thence to the little colony he had left at Fairhaven Inlet.

As he thought of the clean, cool Point, the blue water and the roses, and the cheery, sympathetic presence of the girl, his feeling of loneliness increased. He developed a sudden and unreasoning hatred of the city and all it contained, and wished heartily that he were back by the Sound again. It would be another day, he reflected, before he could terminate his stock-market transaction and deposit the proceeds, and if he were to re-invest his funds it might be longer still.

Yielding easily to a half-conscious impulse, he went into the writing room. Before he had time to consider his action he had drawn a sheet of paper toward him, and had written "Dear Adrea."

The words on the blank page stared up at him and made him hesitate.

"Dear Adrea——"

He smiled rather boyishly at what he had begun to do, but nevertheless he kept on.

"Have you," he wrote, "ever felt the loneliness that comes to one in the midst of millions? Then you know what has prompted me, just now, to talk a moment with you. The club is deserted; my friends are all distressingly busy, or away, and New York seems like a city of strangers, hot, breathless and inhospitable. I shall have to remain here, I fear, until to-morrow, and perhaps, until next day.

"I saw Lavigne for a moment this morning, and he looked much upset; but he did not say when he would return.

"If you feel at all nervous, do get Mrs. Leighton to come over and stay with you.

"The little group of houses on the Point, the blue sky, the bluer water, and the roses seem very remote to me—almost unreal and unreachable, though I know they are but two hours away, and I left them only this morning. I shall hurry back at the earliest possible moment.

"Morton Payne."

As he sealed the envelope, he glanced up and saw Lawrence coming across the room in search of him. He hastily wrote the address and rose to meet him.

"Hello, Mr. Country Gentleman," called Allan. "Couldn't stand it without a breath of city dust! I expected you would turn up about this time. What is it? Doesn't the estimable Mrs. Leighton come up to sample?"

"Mrs. Leighton is a treasure," Payne stoutly replied, "and nothing could have dragged me to this vile place except the miserable necessity you are pleased to worship here as Business."

Lawrence laughed.

"I saw Lavigne down town," he said. "He's up on business, too, he told me. Got caught in the Enderby lamb-pen, I suspect, though he didn't say so. He looked green all over—just like his eyes. What brought you?"

"Oh, I had some stuff that began to slump yesterday, and I wanted Franklin's advice," Payne replied, in an attempt at an offhand manner, which did not for a moment deceive.

"So! You got caught too. Scotia? I thought so. That's the hardest hit of the lot. You got out, I hope, in some sort of shape."

"Oh, yes," Payne answered a little wearily. "I didn't do so badly, but I'm glad I came, all the same, and I shall be even gladder to get back."

"And Lavigne?"

"Lavigne is pretty hard hit, Allan. He didn't sell, as you advised him, and he's about ten thousand dollars out."

"Fool!" said Lawrence. "I knew good advice was thrown away on him."

The appearance of Peters, announcing that lunch was served, put an end to the conversation for the moment, and, as they walked to the elevator, Lawrence noticed that Payne asked for a special delivery stamp to put on his letter. He did not remark upon it, but he made a long guess as to its address.

Across the table in the big, sparsely-populated dining-room the talk turned naturally to the little colony at the Inlet, Lawrence inquiring for Adrea and her aunt, and asking interestedly about the progress of the two pictures.

"I can't seem to get the right pose," Payne complained. "It's queer, too, for before she had

posed at all I was sure I knew, in my own mind, exactly the thing I want. But since I've come to know her, and to see her every day, my first idea seems inadequate, somehow."

"Does Lavigne seem to be having the same kind of trouble?" Lawrence asked.

"No. Lavigne has evidently got what he's after, and is making good progress, though of course I know nothing of what he has actually done."

"It's a rather unique circumstance, Mort," Lawrence said reflectively. "You'll have to go some, I'm thinking, to outstrip Lavigne. He's mercenary, but he *is* talented, I must admit, and unless he goes to pieces with the blues over his finances, he'll paint like a fiend for the Wostenholm."

Lawrence paused at the sound of new voices in the room, and both looked up to see a party of three entering.

"That's queer," Lawrence whispered, leaning across the table and indicating a big man who seemed to be the central figure of the group. "That's the man now!"

Payne looked and saw a tall, strong figure, a great grizzled head, bearded face and blue, kindly eyes that looked as if they were habitually amused at something.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Why, Wostenholm, Charles J. Wostenholm, the young artists' new benefactor, the man whose

ten thousand dollars you and Lavigne are working so hard for."

Payne looked again. The party was approaching and Wostenholm loomed big as he pushed a little in advance of the others. Though evidently nearing sixty, he was still vigorous with the iron sort of strength of those whose youth has been spent in toil out of doors, under the sky, and not bent over an office desk in a sunless, city pile of steel and stone. Lawrence looked up, expectantly.

"Why, hello, youngster! We meet again, do we?" and Wostenholm's big hand rested a moment on Allan's shoulder. "That interview came out exactly as you predicted. You had your man down pat, son. I congratulate you."

"Thanks," said Lawrence, rising. "I want you to meet my friend Payne. He's one of the newer expatriates, just home at the call of duty and the Wostenholm Foundation."

"Ah!" said the big man, with a chuckle. "I thought it would bring them. So you came back to help the cause, did you, Mr. Payne? Well, it's a good cause. It has seemed to me for a long time that we, over here, weren't sharing fairly in the beautiful things of this world. We go to Europe for our paintings and our sculptures, because they make them over there, and always have.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't compete here, is there? American engineers, American

manufacturers, American farmers lead the world. Why shouldn't American artists? They say we haven't the leisure. That seemed to me a good reason, so I took a notion to put a few of you fellows into the leisure class long enough to set you on your feet. That's why I started the Foundation.

"American subjects, done by American artists, ought to be typical of the art of this country. Why should we fill our houses and our public galleries with pictures of the Old World? We have our own types of men and women, some of them passing ones, to be sure, but all the more interesting for that. They must be recorded, embalmed as a part of the history of the land. Who is to do it but American painters?

"No, the art of Europe is desirable, but our own should come first, and every young man, who, like yourself, Mr. Payne, tries seriously, helps toward the development of ideals, which in time will be an asset to the nation. I wish you luck, sir. Come and see my pictures sometime."

And waving a hand at Lawrence, Charles J. Wostenholm followed his two companions toward the door of a private room, through which they were already disappearing.

"So that's the great Wostenholm," said Payne, watching the big shoulders swing down the aisle of tables. "I didn't know you knew him, Allan. Why didn't you tell me?"

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"I've only met him within the last week. He's a client of ours, it seems, though we haven't done much of his business for some little time. The other day he had a matter that was turned over to me because of my acquaintance with some of the Western parties, and it seems that I have made good."

Luncheon over, Lawrence looked at his watch and announced that he must hurry down town.

"Hold on, Allan," Payne objected, "I haven't got all I want from you, yet. You'll have to bunk me somewhere. I've given up my rooms, you know."

"Of course," assented Lawrence, "go right up, but I'm dining out and shan't see you till late, so you'd better not count on me for the evening."

"All right, but why can't you slip off and run down with me to-morrow? I shall leave in the afternoon, I hope. You can't be greatly rushed just now. Stay over the week-end. Adrea would be glad to see you, I'm sure, and you must hear her play. That's a treat you've missed."

"Play?" queried Lawrence.

"Yes, the violin. I only discovered it the other day. She's exquisite. She played a little thing of MacDowell's for me, and I never heard such execution. You'll come?"

"I'd like to," said Lawrence. "She's a bully-good girl. I admire her tremendously. But I can't get away to-morrow; Saturday, at the earliest. I will come down then."

Lawrence departed, leaving Payne to his own devices, which seemed to be few. He dined alone at the club, went to a roof-garden afterward, and was asleep before Allan returned.

The next day he joyfully left the sun-heated piles of Manhattan, with his face set toward Fairhaven Inlet.

He arrived in mid-afternoon, and walked from the village to the Point with a lightening step, sniffing the crisp Sound breeze. As he passed Adrea's cottage, he looked for some sign of her, but seeing none, he stifled a sudden desire to stop, and strode on toward his own place.

Arriving, he almost ran over Mrs. Leighton at the door, with a newly-beaten rug in her arms.

"Lord, Mr. Payne, how you startled me, sir. But I'm glad to see you back, it's been *that* lonesome with no man about. Miss Adrea'll be glad too, I'm thinkin'. She's out there now, sir. Will you go out while I put your room to rights?"

Walking through the hall to the door at its farther end, Payne flung it open and stepped out, directly into the old-fashioned garden, where the roses, in the full glory of their June efflorescence, covered walls and trellises in sweet profusion. At first, he did not see Adrea, and stepped to the grass below.

He advanced softly to a vine-clad hedge, and suddenly stopped. She was seated on a stone bench where a little peristyle of three rose-entwined columns made a striking background.

She sat leaning a little forward, with an open letter on her knee, and looking up with eyes smiling, but a little wistful, her lips barely parted as if repeating the words she had just read. Her attitude and her expression were so girlish, so unstudied and so altogether charming, that Payne paused to gaze a moment, before she should become conscious of his presence.

All at once it came to him that this was the pose for which he had been blindly seeking. A young girl with her lover's letter in her hand, repeating, softly, the words he had written, her eyes shining with happiness and wonder, touched with the wistful longing for his presence.

Payne stood motionless while the lines of the picture drew themselves upon the tablets of his memory. Then she turned and saw him. In an instant the spell was broken, and the picture vanished. With a half-startled little cry, she rose in confusion as he stepped forward. Their hands touched, and the color deepened in her cheeks as she swiftly dropped the letter among the blossoms in her garden-basket.

"We had almost given up expecting you for to-day," she said. "I'm so glad you are back."

"That's quite worth going away for," he said, half-seriously. "I may decide to do it often."

"And did you succeed in bringing Mr. Lawrence down with you?"

"No," Payne replied, "Allan is immersed in some affair of the great Charles J. Wostenholm,

and couldn't leave before Saturday. How have you gotten along, and how is your aunt?"

"We've done very well," said the girl, "and Aunt Margaret has been over here both mornings. She loves it so. It was almost pathetic to see her delight at the garden. It brought back such sweet old memories of her girlhood, she said, that it seemed only yesterday when she was young, and the days were full of sunshine."

"Then you haven't really missed me?" Payne inquired in mock anxiety.

"Oh, fie, Mr. Payne, that is unworthy. Must I really say it when it should be so obvious? One can't sit dreaming in a rose-garden for days, you know, without some sort of employment. Of course you were missed—by Mrs. Leighton particularly. It seems you brought her pastry flour when she wanted the other kind, and she's talked of little else."

"And Lavigne's not back?" he asked.

"No; we've heard nothing from him; nor has his servant. I went this morning to inquire. But you must be famished after that hot, dusty ride in the train," she said, abruptly changing the subject. "Shall I see if Mrs. Leighton can't give you some of her tea cakes?"

"Do. Shall we have it out here?"

She nodded, and catching up her basket ran into the house.

Payne seated himself on the stone bench. Whose letter was it that had caused that look

in her eyes? As her attitude and her expression came back to him, he wondered what other men had a place in her mind and heart. He had not thought of her as a girl who had met many men, but this was absurd, he told himself. Why shouldn't she know men, dozens of them, like any other girl? The fact that he had known nothing of her life previous to her coming into his, now stood out with its many possibilities. Why shouldn't she even be engaged?

It was quite likely, he considered. Such a charming girl must have many admirers. What sort of man was he, this letter-writer? The idea was disturbing. It could not have been from Lavigne—she had said as much. Lawrence? A vague sense of uneasiness, of disappointment came over him, and taking out his cigarette case he struck a match sharply against the stone seat, and smoked with long, reflective inhalations.

Soon he heard the door open and shut, and Adrea appeared, trundling a wheeled tea-table before her across the lawn.

"Don't bite," she called as she drew near. "You look hungry enough to eat one up."

"Perhaps I am," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

TREACHERY

THE next morning, Friday, Adrea, at Payne's request, was early at the studio. She found him dressed in flannels, seated on the model stand, surrounded by a dozen or more studies of herself, which he was examining critically, and seemingly with little satisfaction.

As she entered, Payne looked up. She was gowned most simply, in white, with a wild rose at her breast and the light of the morning in her eyes. He dropped the study he was holding at arm's length, and rising, took both her hands.

"You look as fresh as the rose you wear, Adrea," he said. "I really believe we are going to make a beginning to-day."

"Why to-day?"

"I don't know; there is something in the air this morning that breathes of potential accomplishment. Before to-day, some of these things almost pleased me, but I have been poring over them for an hour, and I see now that they are not the real thing at all. It's almost like seeing by clear, bright daylight, a place you have only known at night. All the distortion and blurrings

and illusions are swept away, and things stand out in their true proportions and colors. It's really startling."

The girl smiled. "And what is to become of me, if you please, now that all your illusions, which I suppose include me, have been swept away? Perhaps you won't need me, now that you see me in your new-found clarity of vision, exactly as I am."

Payne made a gesture of protest.

"Don't explain," she warned, laughingly. "You will only make it worse. I had never suspected that you, who are ordinarily so sensible, could talk like that."

"Like what?" demanded Payne ruefully, conscious of having made rather an ass of himself, he did not know just how.

"Why, about the mysterious faults in the studies you have made, and the 'sweeping away' of the fog before your eyes and all that. I'm ashamed of you. It sounds like what all the little near-artists say to the know-nothings they take to the exhibitions."

"Oh," said Payne, humbly, "I beg your pardon. I'll try to put it differently. I've a new hunch, then, that I'm going to turn the trick. You certainly measure up better than the specifications, and it's up to me to deliver the goods, in a way to make the critics sit up and wink hard. How's that?"

"That," she said, judicially, "sounds like

Eighth Avenue, but I'll forgive you, for I see you are really in earnest. Shall I sit here?"

"No," said Payne, picking up a light easel and some drawing crayons, and pushing open the long French window that led to the garden. "We will try it out here this morning."

He led the way straight to the stone seat, backed by the rose-twined columns, while Adrea followed, wonderingly.

"When I walked out here looking for you, yesterday," he began, "you were sitting there. You had just been reading a pleasant letter from someone, and you were holding it on your knee, and your lips were moving, as if you were repeating some of the words. You did not see me, at first, and I stood, perhaps for a whole minute, looking at you. I should have watched you even longer if you had not turned, because I knew then that this was the very pose I have been blindly seeking.

"Nothing could have been more perfect. Your left hand was by your side, your palm resting on the bench, so; your head was raised a little, so, and your profile showed beautifully clear-cut against the green beyond. Do you think you could take it again, or," with a twinkling eye, "will you have to run home for the very satisfactory letter that caused it all?"

As Payne spoke, the rosy color mounted to Adrea's hair, and at his mention of the letter she dropped her eyes, and touched with her toe

a dainty rose petal that lay fallen on the grass.

"I think I can remember all the letter had to say. It was a very short one," she answered, demurely. And she sat down upon the stone seat, falling at once so nearly into the pose, that with a few corrections from Payne, it was accomplished.

"Perfect!" he cried. "It's beautiful!"

Payne was all artist, now, and drew in the lines of the figure with swift and certain strokes. Adrea, more accustomed by this time to holding a pose, sat motionless minute after minute while he worked, completely absorbed in his inspiration.

There was no hesitancy in his lines now, no changings of position, no faltering or vain seeking for effect. His crayon went true, and he caught each curve of the girl's figure, each shadow in the folds of her gown, with a precision that surprised even him.

The poise of the graceful head, the slender column of the throat, the delicate curve of the up-swept hair were all transferred, unerringly, to the canvas before him, until the entire expression of face and figure stood out as had the picture that had been impressed upon his brain the day before.

It was as if the living model were only needed, momentarily, to supply the smaller details of light and shadow. He left the figure and had

begun to block in, with light strokes, a general idea of the background when a sigh escaped the girl and he looked at her sharply.

"What a brute I am!" he exclaimed, shocked at her paleness. "Why didn't you speak before? I didn't realize it had been so long."

She turned and drew her hand across her eyes. "No, it is all right," she said. "It was only the last minute or two that began to trouble me. Perhaps if I move about I shall feel better."

She rose a little wearily, swayed, and might have fallen had he not sprung to catch her. As it was, she drooped against him, and her head fell forward on his breast, the fragrance of her hair against his lips.

For a moment he held her close, hardly realizing that she had fainted, while the delicious redolence of her whole person seemed to rise about him and envelop him in its impalpable sweetness. In an instant he recovered himself, and laid her on the ground, rubbing her hands and calling her by name.

"Adrea! Adrea, dear child!"

She opened her eyes slowly as if coming back was disturbing to her, and as she saw his anxious face, she smiled and then lay back, drowsily, upon his arm. He spoke to her again

"Adrea, dear!"

"Yes," she said, and in an instant was fully conscious.

"How silly of me!" she exclaimed, making an

effort to rise. "Please don't think it was your fault. I really am not one of the fade-away kind. I think it was because I tried to keep so still that I sometimes forgot to breathe."

"Yes," he agreed, "that is frequently the trouble with beginners. There is no need, you know, of being absolutely motionless. Besides, it is apt to make the pose unnatural."

He helped her to her feet and suggested that they go to the house for some coffee, but she protested that she was entirely herself again, and demanded to see what he had done. She stepped in front of the easel with a little cry of delight, so spontaneous that Payne felt he could have had no pleasanter or more sincere criticism.

"It's wonderful," she said, standing back and gazing long at the figure on the canvas. "You must have worked incredibly fast to do so much."

"And selfishly long," he put in. "So you really like it?"

The girl looked again, long and critically. "It's marvelous," she said. "Is it really me?"

As an illustrator, Payne had developed the knack of suggesting a wealth of detail in the simplest lines, and in his morning's work he had used this talent to the utmost, so that the study appeared far more fully drawn than it really was. He stood by Adrea, looking at it.

"Yes, I've caught you fairly well, on the whole. It expresses what I was after. It's the eyes that count, and the poise of the head, and the bare

parting of the lips. If I feel the same about it to-morrow, I shall be satisfied."

Payne picked up the easel, and they walked to the house. He gave a last, searching glance at his drawing as he dropped a film of silken scarf across it.

"Can you come to-morrow if Lavigne is not back?" he asked.

"Gladly," said the girl, and refusing again his offer of coffee and sandwiches, she prepared to go.

Payne took a step forward, and hesitated.

"Yes?" she questioned, turning in the doorway and looking at him.

"I was just thinking," he said, "that perhaps you might bring with you that very pleasant letter—just to aid the expression, you know."

The absent color came back to her face with a rush, and shaking her head, with a little laugh she was gone.

Payne watched her from the door as she walked down the drive, marking anew her pretty, unconscious grace, and the youthful lightness of her step. The sound of wheels in the road beyond caused him to look up. Lavigne, driven by a boy from the village, was approaching. He saw him motion his driver to pull up, and heard him speak to Adrea.

"I'm back again, Miss Adrea," he said, "all ready to work very hard in the morning. You'll come at the usual hour?"

Payne thought he saw the girl hesitate for the

fraction of a second in her reply, and half turn toward the house as if to appeal to him. Then:

"Yes indeed, I will be there, Mr. Lavigne," he heard her say.

And with a parting word Lavigne drove on.

Payne stepped out on the porch as he passed.

"Hello, Lavigne," he called. "I beat you back, you see. Came yesterday afternoon. Will you come in?"

Lavigne seemed to consider for an instant, then telling the boy to take his bag on to the bungalow, he left the carryall.

As he walked up to the veranda, Payne noted that he appeared a little haggard, and that his color was even worse than usual.

"Come in," he said, hospitably. "You have been worrying too much. It's telling on you."

"I know," said Lavigne dropping into a big willow chair. "I have gotten a pretty stiff setback, Payne. I shall have to work hard to make it up."

"You will, though," nodded Payne encouragingly, "I don't know of anyone who can beat you at your best. Come in, man."

They went into the studio, and Payne stepped toward the cupboard by the chimney-place. "What shall it be?" he called. "I've got some bottled Bass in the ice-box."

"That sounds good," said Lavigne; "just what I've been wanting this hour, without knowing it."

"Sit down. I won't be a moment," and Payne left the room.

But Lavigne did not sit down. He was looking at the studies of Adrea Varrick, scattered about the model-stand. He stepped closer and picked one up, his eyes wandering shiftily toward the door. He took up others, carefully dropping those already examined in the places where they had lain. Then he noticed the easel, with its veiled canvas.

Listening for an instant, he swiftly raised the drapery of silk that hid the study in black and white. Lavigne started, and a low exclamation escaped him. For one long, earnest, concentrated moment he kept his eyes fixed, absorbing to the uttermost detail the pose, the expression, the whole striking ensemble of the composition. The look of the wolf came into his greenish eyes, and his lips drew back from his teeth, for this man knew in that one tense instant that he was looking on the embryo of a masterpiece.

He heard a bang as the door of the ice-box slammed shut, and as Payne's returning footsteps sounded on the bare floor of the room beyond, he dropped into a chair. The light died out of his close-set eyes, leaving his face blank and more drawn than before.

Payne entered briskly, the cool, moisture-beaded bottles clinking in his hand.

"The best thing in the world for the all-gone feeling," he said, as he hunted for a cockscrew.

"I rarely drink the stuff, you know, but I generally keep it on hand. Lawrence likes to guzzle it."

"By the way," said Lavigne, slowly, as if in an effort to make conversation, taking the brimming glass in a hand that was not quite steady, "I ran into Allan yesterday, at the club. He said he was to week-end with you."

"Good!" cried Payne, "I didn't know. He said he might get away. He's busy with a fine big client—none other than Charles J. Wostenholm, the artists' friend. I met him as we were lunching at the club the other day. He delivered himself of a little monologue on American art, its shortcomings and its possiblities. 'American art for America,' is his idea. Asked me to come and see his pictures."

Lavigne said nothing. He was thinking of the picture he had seen beneath the easel-scarf. Was this man to add to his advantage a personal acquaintance with the founder of the Wostenholm?

"I should like to go with you," he said.

"Certainly," said Payne. "He didn't offer the show in a personal way at all. I imagine he says much the same thing to every man he meets."

Lavigne sipped his beer and watched Payne mix one of his concoctions of gin and water. "Do you *never* drink anything else?" he asked. "I should think it would pall as a steady thing."

"Oh, no, I don't drink enough to tire of it. One just before bed-time is generally my limit. I'm not very strong for alcohol, but I like a little."

The talk soon turned to the stock-market, Lavigne speaking of his loss with great bitterness, and Payne giving the best sympathy he could. Lavigne desired greatly to know the amount Payne had dropped on his Scotia speculation, but he did not care to ask outright, and as Payne evaded the subject of his own dealings, he was baffled in his attempt to gain the information in a roundabout way. But his first opinion, that Payne had lost more than he could afford, still clung tenaciously, and his host's evasions convinced him still further of its correctness.

As he rose to leave he said: "I hope my wanting Miss Varrick to-morrow won't upset any plans you might have made. I'm very anxious to get to work again, or I shouldn't have cared about her until Monday."

"Not at all, old chap," Payne answered, good-naturedly, though as a matter of fact he was much disappointed at Lavigne's inopportune arrival. "I had her all the morning, you know, and a bully-good sitting it was."

"Found what you wanted? queried Lavigne, gazing out of the big, north window in feigned abstraction.

"Yes, exactly," Payne answered with unmis-

takable enthusiasm. "I believe what I did this morning will stand for a beginning."

"Well, wish you luck. I must go along."

And with a feeling in his heart that grew and grew slowly into fear, indefinable, but none the less real, Lavigne walked moodily toward his own place.

As soon as he reached the house he went directly to the studio, and flinging the cover from his easel, stood a long time before it.

At first, his manner and his expression showed a depth of discouragement. He paced up and down the room, his hands clasping and unclasping behind his back, or feverishly pushing the hair from his forehead. At every turn he stopped before the study he had made of Adrea Varrick. It was more complete than Payne's—less left to the imagination. He had even begun to paint in the shadows of the background, and the figure of the young girl in the elaborate ball-gown stood out sharply on the canvas.

Finally he stopped short before it, and suddenly there came a change. Into his eyes sprung the wolfish light that had gleamed in them when he gazed on the hidden picture in Payne's house. He threw up his head, and struck his hands together with a sharp intaking of breath.

With close-drawn brows and narrowed eyes, he scrutinized the drawing, line by line. Then he sank slowly into a chair before it with a steady gaze that seemed to see into and beyond the can-

vas, there reflecting an intangible something back through the wide-open portals of his tremendous imagination. Minute after minute he sat, his breath coming quickly, utterly lost to his surroundings and to himself, completely absorbed in the new thought that possessed him.

CHAPTER IX

THE THUMB-PRINT

WHEN Adrea arrived at nine o'clock the next morning she found Lavigne busily engaged in squeezing colors on his palette. From a table in the corner he brought a great sheaf of brushes in a queer Chinese jar, and selecting several, examined them with care. When she re-entered the studio, after putting on the bespangled gown, she found him garbed in a loose, paint-stained smock, ready for the morning's work.

"So you're really going to begin to paint," she commented as she settled herself in the pose.

"Yes," he answered. "I decided the last time you sat, that I had gone as far as I could without at least trying the effect of color. Head a little to the right, if you please, eyes on the picture. That's it."

He rapidly rubbed up a color on his palette, and choosing a brush began to lay it on with bold, free-hand strokes, standing at arm's length and glancing up at her frequently, in his quick, nervous way.

Adrea, remembering Payne's advice about not forgetting to breathe, allowed herself more free-

dom in the pose, and tried not to see the disagreeable picture that was her *vis-à-vis*. It seemed even more offensive than usual this morning, but still she said nothing.

Lavigne worked on with energy. He seemed much more sure of himself and of his treatment of his subject than at their former sittings, and she wondered at his new-found inspiration.

She glanced at him from time to time, and was puzzled at the queer smile that played about his mouth, and at the almost cruel look in his eyes. He seemed to find little joy in his work, but rather a grim sort of satisfaction, as it grew under his hands.

His brush-work was deliberate, sure, exact. His hand performed its office with the perfection of long practice, and with a certainty that bespoke the cunning of a master-craftsman.

She felt, as she watched him, that she, the subject, was in reality playing but a small part in the coming work, and the conviction gradually came to her mind, that when she was finally permitted to look upon the result she would find not a portrait, but merely a genre-picture.

"Don't you think, Mr. Lavigne, that I should be a far more intelligent *poseur* if I knew more exactly the idea you are trying to convey? You have not troubled in the least about my expression since we began, and that seems rather strange. When I sit here I feel as if my face was just a blank, that I am nobody in particular—

just a lay figure, with no part except to supply the bare physical outline."

Lavigne gave a short laugh. "I don't blame you for being curious," he said. "You wouldn't be a woman if you weren't, and therefore of no use to me, but I am afraid I shall have to disappoint you for the present. I have quite made up my mind about the picture, but anything like criticism might tend to upset it.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "you are painting me as a modern Mrs. Bluebeard and the quality of curiosity is exactly the attribute it is necessary for me to possess."

"Perhaps," agreed Lavigne, smiling to himself. "It sounds reasonable, doesn't it?"

She fell into the pose again, and the morning wore slowly on. It was nearly noon when he let her go, and she noticed that he drew the curtain in front of the canvas before she left the model-stand. She did not like being distrusted, no matter on what pretext.

On her way home she met Payne, coming back from a tramp to the village, and he walked to the cottage with her.

"And how was Our Lady of the Letter this morning when you looked at her?" she asked, as he fell into step by her side.

"Beautiful," he answered warmly. "I never started anything so well in my life. There's not a line I would change. I could begin on the color this very minute."

He was so enthusiastic, that with a sudden impulse she offered to help him in the afternoon.

"I see you are in the mood," she said, "and it would be too bad for you to wait until Monday, for if Mr. Lawrence comes there will be no painting for you to-morrow, of course."

"You surely do not mean that you would break the Lord's Day to pose for me!" he exclaimed, in mock horror.

"Yes, I would even do that," she said, "for the sake of seeing the picture grow. I am sternly denied that privilege by Mr. Lavigne."

Payne scowled a little at this, but made no comment.

"And you are sure you are not too tired to come this afternoon? I should appreciate it above all things. You are right when you say I am in the mood. I'm wild to go on."

"Then I will come directly after lunch," she decided. "That will give us two good hours before Mr. Lawrence's train arrives."

"Yes, and then we can go up the Inlet for him in the motor-boat."

At the gate she gave him her hand.

"*Au revoir*, Lady of the Letter," he said, bowing over it.

The early afternoon hours at the studio were full of accomplishment. Adrea wondered at the difference between sitting to Payne and posing for Lavigne. One was a pleasure. the other a task.

Now that the drawing had been perfected, it was much easier work for her, and she found she was able to sit through long periods without resting.

Payne encouraged her to talk. He himself contributed little to the conversation, beyond skilfully leading it from topic to topic, but he was vastly entertained by the girl's ideas, and more than once surprised at the range of her knowledge. As the westering sun began to throw the long tree-shadows across the lawn, Payne stopped painting, suddenly, and looked at his watch.

"By Jove! We've been having such a good time that we've forgotten all about poor Lawrence. We'll have to hurry to catch him before he starts to walk."

Hastily slipping out of his paint-daubed gown, he caught up a cap.

"You have no hat, Adrea, and we have scarcely time to stop and get one for you. Never mind, take this," and he thrust a soft Panama into her hand.

"But I don't need any hat," she protested. "I hate one in the summer. Going without is half the fun."

"But you mustn't go without," he commanded. "I order you not to."

"And why, pray?" she asked, a little impudently, tossing her head and looking at him from under drooping eyelids.

"Your hair. The sun will burn it into all sorts of streaks, and I can't have that at all. I could never make anything out of it, and as it is now, it's going to be one of my chief assets. It's very beautiful. Of course you know that."

"Oh," she said solemnly, "and there's my complexion, too, and the tip of my nose, which even I have always admired. Perhaps I ought to go about veiled."

"Now you're laughing at me," he protested, "and after such a compliment, too."

He seized the hat and placed it far down over her head, pulling the brim down front and back.

"There, that ought to save your precious nose. Come on," and laughing like two children they ran down the slope to the boat-house.

Lawrence's train, for a wonder, was on time, and he was about to negotiate for a village conveyance when Payne and Adrea arrived.

"Hello, Mort. How do you do, Miss Adrea," he hailed as they appeared. "Did you walk over? No, I see you didn't. Got a motor-boat, have you? That's fine. Here, boy, shan't need you and your winged steed after all." He gave the youth a quarter.

"Don't spend it for drink," he cautioned. "Put it in the contribution box, to-morrow, if you must get rid of it."

Payne seized Lawrence's grip, and the three walked down to the boat-slip.

"How did you know we came by boat, Mr.

Lawrence?" Adrea asked. "You couldn't have seen us from where you were."

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, how did you know we didn't walk?" put in Payne.

"Ho!" cried Allan. "Easy enough. No dust on your shoes and a black grease-spot in the palm of Payne's right hand told the story."

"Marvelous," laughed the girl. "It has the real Sherlockian ring, hasn't it, Mr. Payne?"

"Mr. Payne, Mr. Payne?" questioned Lawrence in feigned surprise. "Haven't you two gotten acquainted yet? I thought wearing one another's hats might imply less formality."

"Better stick to shoes and ships and grease spots, Allan. Hats seem to be over your head," grinned Payne; "we're only half acquainted as yet. She lets *me* call *her* Adrea."

"Lavigne back?" inquired Lawrence, taking a new tack, while Payne handed Adrea into the boat and cranked the engine.

"Yes, he came yesterday afternoon."

"Hm, how was he, pretty blue? I thought so. Last time I saw him it looked like an even chance that he'd turn up as a floater in the river. I never saw a man knocked out so completely."

"No, nothing like that, I should say. He seems to have settled down to work again, like the rest of us."

The boat flew down the Inlet in the midst of a fountain of far-scattered spray, and Payne, at the wheel, handily made a landing in front of

Adrea's cottage. The girl waved to them from the lawn as the craft sped on toward the boat-house.

"Well, Mort, how goes the *chef d'œuvre?* Still making studies, or have you hit on something?"

"I think I've got it, Allan," Payne replied, and there was no mistaking the enthusiasm of his tone.

"I caught her the day I got back, sitting on the stone bench, over there in that little peristyle place, reading a letter. I came upon her unawares, and I knew the moment I saw her that the whole thing was perfect. She was beautiful."

"Of course she's beautiful. She's the finest girl I know," Lawrence agreed heartily. "If you can't make the Wostenholm, and at the same time paint yourself into the hearts of the public with that girl sitting for you, you might as well give it up. How does the color handle, all right?"

"I'll show you," Payne said, leading the way to the studio.

"Stand over there, where you will get a good light."

As he spoke, he uncovered the canvas.

Lawrence gazed at the work with intentness. For a full minute he stood; then he sat down in the nearest chair, his eyes still fixed on the picture. Suddenly he looked at Payne, standing uneasily at one side, awaiting the verdict.

"By the Lord Harry, Mort!" he burst out, jumping up and reaching for his friend's hand.

"I never suspected it. I knew you could draw for the popular fancy, but this! Why, man, this is master-work!"

He stepped back to look at the picture again, nodding his head from time to time in new approval, and making little admiring exclamations under his breath.

"I tell you, Mort, if you hold your stride on this it will make your fortune. For a study, it promises more than anything I ever saw. I'm glad you got some color into it before I came down. The figure stands out now, in a way that is unmistakable. You've caught the trick. All you have to do, now, is be careful of your details. Don't get sketchy; you can't afford to with this thing. It must be finished work, you understand, everything."

Payne stood by, gravely listening to these encomiums. He was not flattered. Instead, he felt a little disturbed. He knew that Lawrence's judgment was excellent, and that any opinion he might give could be relied upon as an honest one. He felt that he had made a good start, but he also had begun to nurse a fear that he could not keep the pace he had set for himself; could not sustain and carry to fruition as a perfect whole, the work he had so bravely begun.

It seemed to him, as he stood by his friend and looked at the figure of Adrea as he had drawn her, that the inspiration which had been vouchsafed his mind, and the cunning that had been

given to his hand, greater, he knew, than he had ever possessed before, might suddenly be taken away, and leave him to struggle on, with consciously lessening power, until the result should be reduced through many slow, agonizing stages to hopeless mediocrity.

He expressed something of this feeling to Lawrence.

"Nonsense," cried that cheerful mentor. "Just don't pore over the thing. Take your time. When you feel doubtful, take a day or so off. Run up to town, anything to get your mind on outside things. You aren't a mill-hand, bound to hours and the compelling need of a daily wage. You've time enough. Take it. Cheer up, and give me some of that Bass you promised to have on ice."

Payne, returning with the beer, found Allan comfortably stretched on a wicker couch on the veranda, watching the gathering clouds that forewarned of a shower. Tabooing the subject of the picture, Lawrence led the talk in neutral channels until the two were driven indoors by the pelting drops that began to fall on the heels of a magnificent lightning-flash and a reverberant clatter of thunder.

The shower extended, intermittently, well into the evening.

"Too bad," complained Lawrence, as they sat smoking in the studio after dinner. "I hoped we might get Miss Varrick over for a musicale. I should like to hear her play."

"She's worth hearing," agreed Payne from a big chair by the fireplace, where he had lighted a cheerful blaze. "Perhaps we can arrange it before Monday. What shall we do to-morrow?"

"Why not take the whole crowd down the shore in the motor-boat and have luncheon on some beach, if we can find one that's uninhabited."

"The very thing, though there's Lavigne. I suppose we really ought to ask him, poor devil," said Payne, and Lawrence, though he shrugged, made no objection.

But when morning came, Lavigne declined, pleading various employments. Adrea, on whom they called immediately after breakfast, gave them a more real disappointment. The servant was gone for the day, she said, and she did not feel willing to leave her aunt alone. Mrs. Leighton had gone to friends at the village, so there seemed no way of remedying matters, unless, as Lawrence suggested, Aunt Margaret could come with them.

"I'm afraid not," smiled Adrea, shaking her head, "she is gaining every day, but this would be almost too much."

So the two men provisioned the little craft, and set off by themselves, with the distinct feeling that something was amiss with the day's enjoyment.

It was late afternoon when they returned, both lobster-red from the sun, and not overly satisfied with their outing. Lawrence started from

the shore with the lunch-basket, leaving Payne making the boat snug in her berth. Mrs. Leighton had not returned, and leaving the things on the kitchen porch he walked to the front veranda. To his surprise he found the long, glass doors of the studio ajar.

As he distinctly remembered seeing Payne secure them, he stooped quickly and examined the lock. The bolt had been shot, but either someone had forced the doors open in their absence, or they had not been entirely closed when the key was turned, and the bolt had not caught.

He stepped into the studio, glancing about sharply. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, and he walked to the easel and raised the scarf that covered it. The picture was untouched.

As he stood looking at it, his eye caught a mark in the corner of the canvas, a spot that showed plainly in the freshly painted background. Its peculiar shape and position caused him to carefully examine it. It was the imprint of a human thumb.

"Payne's, of course," Lawrence thought, "though it's pretty careless handling. Why should he want to handle it, anyway?"

Instantly his mind went back to the open door, and then—to Julius Lavigne. Picking up a reading glass from a tabouret, he studied the imprint with greater interest. The lines and

skin-markings of the hand that made it, were plain and well preserved. The print was in the left-hand corner of the picture, near the edge, just in the place where a person desiring to lift the canvas for a better light would naturally grasp it. Lawrence looked a second time. It was plainly a man's thumb—a man's left thumb.

Curious, now, he had already formed a theory that Lavigne, knowing the house to be unwatched, had been unable to stifle his desire to see Payne's work, and had gone to the length of forcing the door and viewing the picture. But how was he to be sure that this was the mark of Lavigne's hand?

He stood for some moments in deep thought. Presently his eye fell on Payne's palette, lying on a low stand beside the easel, and it occurred to him in a flash, that Payne, habitually holding it in his left hand, would probably have recorded his thumb-print along the edge of the hole.

He picked up the palette and scrutinized it through the magnifying glass. There was a thumb-print, as clear and distinct as that on the margin of the picture. But the markings were utterly unlike.

Hearing Payne's footstep on the veranda, he quickly laid the palette down, and dropped the covering over the canvas.

"Hello, how'd you get in? I thought I locked that door when we left," Payne said, as he entered the room.

"You're a mighty poor locker, then," returned the other. "I found it just ajar, with the bolt shot. You probably turned the key when the door was not fully closed."

But Lawrence did not cease to think of the matter, and once or twice his host had to speak a second time before he could get an answer to the simplest of questions.

"Allan," Payne called as they were getting out of their flannels. "What do you say if we go over and cheer Lavigne up awhile? He acts like a bear with a sore paw. I tell you I'm really sorry for the chap. He may have dropped more than we know."

This was exactly the opportunity for which Lawrence had been waiting. He had wanted to propose it himself, but he did not care to inform Payne of his suspicions, and in view of his dislike of the man, any such suggestion coming from him would have caused remark. So he seemed to hesitate.

"I suppose he *is* a bit down on his luck. I don't believe any cheering up I can do will be very spontaneous, but I'll go if you like."

He was first to go down stairs, and took the opportunity to slip into his pocket the reading glass, by means of which he had made his disquieting discovery.

They found Lavigne in the studio, reading. Lawrence allowed Payne to enter the room first, and watched the man's manner carefully. He

rose on hearing their step, and came forward rather uncertainly, glancing from one to the other of his two visitors with his queer, greenish eyes.

"Hello, Lavigne, old man!" cried Payne. "How goes it? We thought we'd come over and cheer you up a bit, if you don't mind."

Lavigne smiled his strange, mirthless smile that left his eyes cold.

"That's very good of you," he said, with a visible effort at cordiality. "Have you had tea?" He started toward a push-button near the door.

"No, no," protested Lawrence, "we've been off all day in the boat, and we've stuffed all the afternoon to get rid of our luncheon for the sake of Mrs. Leighton's feelings as a provider and as a cook. I feel as if I never wanted to look upon food again."

"Well, something to drink, at least. Morton, come hold the light for me, will you, while I rummage."

The instant they were gone Lawrence seized Lavigne's palette from a litter of painter's odds and ends on a near-by table. Drawing his glass from his pocket he carried it to the light and looked with all his eyes.

There, plain as print, was the mark of the same left thumb that had grasped Payne's canvas.

CHAPTER X

FIRE!

"LORD, but he's a cheerful boon-companion!" was Lawrence's explosive comment as soon as they were clear of the bungalow. "You can fairly see the blue devils walking in a circle around him. Has he been this way long?"

"Ever since the Enderby smash, but he was worse to-night than I have seen him," Payne replied.

The shower had cleared the air, and as they walked homeward under the stars, Lawrence fell silent, thinking of his discovery of Lavigne's bad faith. He was considerably disturbed, but he did not wish to speak to Payne, for he knew the knowledge would only make him uncomfortable and do no particular good.

What he feared most was that Lavigne, stung to jealous hatred as Payne's work progressed, and he did not doubt that he would find ample cause for it, might seek to injure the picture. He resolved to put Mrs. Leighton on her guard before he left in the morning, if he could do so without actually telling her of his suspicions.

Wearied with the long day's idleness, both men retired early.

It seemed to Payne that he had been asleep but a few minutes when he was awakened by a sharp rapping on his door, and Mrs. Leighton's voice, calling to him in excited tones.

"Mr. Payne, Mr. Payne, do wake up, sir! Miss Varrick's house is all afire!"

Payne bounded from his bed and flung open the door.

"Fire? At Miss Varrick's?" he questioned, and then, through a window at the end of the hall he caught the red flicker of flame. At the same instant Lawrence's door opened and Allan appeared, already dressed in shoes, shirt and trousers.

"For God's sake, get into something, Mort, and come on. The cottage is on fire."

As he spoke, he plunged down the stairway and disappeared. Payne followed an instant later, catching up a raincoat as he passed through the hall below. Out on the lawn he saw that Lawrence had already covered half the distance to the cottage. The way was brightly lighted by the flames that were bursting from the roof.

As he got nearer he saw, on the veranda-top, silhouetted sharply against a firelit window, the figure of Adrea.

"Let yourself over the edge and drop. I'll catch you," Lawrence shouted, as Payne came up.

"Hurry, Adrea," called Payne, "it's the only way."

The girl hesitated a moment, looking down at the two men, who stood with their arms upraised, some ten feet below. With a despairing look about her, she gathered the long silken wrap she wore close around her limbs and crept to the edge.

"That's it," they encouraged her, "swing off by your hands. Bravo! We have you. Let go!"

With a little cry she dropped, and the men's arms closed about her before she touched the ground. She found herself set lightly on her feet and hurried back a safe distance from the flames, which now were bursting from the lower windows.

"Oh, hurry, save her—my aunt—on the other side!"

"Great God!" cried Lawrence. "Is she still up there?"

"On the other side, the other side!" cried Adrea, already leading the way. "I couldn't get to her. Oh, hurry!"

All three reached the opposite side of the house together. This was the water side, and the grade on which the house was set made the drop considerably greater. Mrs. Butler had climbed out upon the roof of the porch, which was not connected with the veranda from which Adrea had just been rescued. The fire had not yet invaded her room, and for the moment she was comparatively safe.

Payne in an instant grasped the situation.

Throwing his raincoat about the girl and calling to Lawrence to stay where he was, he swarmed up one of the porch pillars, and seizing the edge of the flat roof, drew himself quickly over.

In another moment he was standing beside Mrs. Butler, reassuring her in quiet tones. Telling her to stand still, he dived into her bedroom window and reappeared with his arms full of sheets and blankets. With the former he made a sling, and passing the long, double blanket through its loop, quickly explained that she must trust herself entirely to him.

The elderly woman submitted with extraordinary calmness, and in his improvised hammock he swung her gently over the edge of the roof, and lowered her to the waiting arms of Lawrence on the ground. Then he made an end of the blanket fast to the railing, and slid down himself.

"The cook?" was his first question.

"She did not come home," answered Adrea. "She was to spend the night at the village."

"Then there's not much to do but watch it burn, I fear," said Payne. "Can your aunt walk to my house, or shall we carry her?"

"I can walk very well, Mr. Payne?" spoke up Mrs. Butler, who was plainly the least excited of the four. "Here comes Mrs. Leighton. She can help us. There are some things scattered about, that I threw from the window."

Payne stooped to gather the few garments strewn on the ground. Lawrence, starting to

help, suddenly saw Adrea cover her face with her hands. He touched her on the shoulder reassuringly. "Come," he said, "let's go to the house. I don't wonder you are shaken. It was a narrow escape for both of you."

"It—it isn't that," sobbed the girl, "my violin—I loved it so——"

"Where is it?" Lawrence asked quickly. "Which room? There may be time yet. Why didn't you speak before?"

"The living room," answered the girl. "But—oh, you mustn't. Come back!"

But Lawrence was already up the smoking steps trying to raise the window of the room she had indicated. The fire was just eating through the closed door from the hall, and the interior was already brightly lighted. He saw the black leather violin-case standing in the far corner. In another instant it would be too late.

He forced up the sash and sprang through. Adrea cried out again to stop him, but he did not heed. She saw him plunge forward, and then his form disappeared in the swirling smoke-eddies. For a long, breathless instant she waited. Then she screamed, and Payne came running to her side.

"What is it? Quick!" he demanded.

"It's Mr. Lawrence, he went in there—after my violin," she gasped, pointing at the window that now belched smoke in rolling clouds.

"God!" groaned Payne, and dashed up the steps.

"Oh," moaned the girl. "Not you, too! Not you, too!"

Driven back for an instant by the suffocating torrent, he gave a shout and climbed through the window. As he paused for a second, with one leg over the sill, she saw his face in the red glare, stern, set and purposeful. Then he was gone.

With her hands clasped to her breast, and with fascinated, horror-stricken eyes, she waited, motionless, breathing a prayer. The seconds dragged on through an eternity of time. Then she saw above the sill, one questing hand. It seized the ledge and a face appeared, the eyes closed, the skin blackened, the mouth twisted in agony. A second face showed beside the first, then the forms of the two men, the arm of one about the other, dragging painfully through the opening.

Madly she rushed to their aid, as Payne, with Lawrence, limp and unconscious in his arms, stumbled toward the steps.

Choking and strangling with the smoke he had inhaled, red-eyed, his hands blistered and his clothing on fire, he staggered and fell as she reached him. With her hands, she beat out the sparks upon his cotton shirt, and wildly struggled to roll him to the steps. Lawrence lay where he had dropped.

Adrea gave a hopeless cry and brushed her arm across her eyes to put back the streaming hair.

"Help me! Will no one come?" she cried in an agony of fear.

The sparks fell about her. One burning brand from the porch roof dropped on her flimsy wrap. She tore away the blazing cloth.

Suddenly she saw, below, the form of Lavigne. He was gazing up at her, standing there, doing nothing.

"Mr. Lavigne, come here and help me. Oh, come quickly!"

Lavigne, galvanized into action by her cry, started up the steps. Disregarding Payne's prostrate form, which Adrea was vainly trying to move, he seized that of Lawrence and dragged it from the porch. Then he returned, and together they half-lifted, half-rolled Payne to the ground, and out of danger.

Mrs. Leighton, who was on her way across the fields with Mrs. Butler, had heard the cries, and now came running back. With her vigorous strength she helped Lavigne drag the two men away from the burning house.

As this was being accomplished Payne's consciousness returned. His first question was for Lawrence.

"Never mind me. Look after Allan," he whispered.

Lawrence, though not badly burned, had been nearly suffocated while trying to reach the window, and lay as one dead.

Payne staggered to his feet and went to him.

"Lay him face down, Lavigne. Now press on his back, just under the shoulder blades, and release. Keep doing it."

He felt for a pulse and caught a flutter.

"He's alive, thank God!"

After a few moments, Adrea, bending close, heard a sigh, and Lawrence slowly opened his eyes.

Now a shout was heard above the crackling of the flames and the crash of falling timbers, and the hoof beats of horses and the clanging of a bell resounded, as the volunteer fire company from the village arrived on the scene.

There was really nothing to be done, but with much shouting of orders, and a brave flurry and bustle of activity a score of men backed the old hand-engine against the well-curb, and stretched their single line of hose to the now falling house.

"Hit her up!" yelled the foreman, mounted on the box of the ancient apparatus, and as the brakes moved up and down, worked by lusty arms, a stream of water grew at the nozzle, and fell sputtering on the glowing ruins.

Lawrence, now partially recovered, sat up, watching operations. Adrea bent over him.

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence, why did you do it? Just for a violin! If you had not come back, what should I have done?"

"Never mind, Miss Adrea. Besides I failed to make the rescue. Where's Mort? I—I have to thank him, you know, for my life."

"No you don't, old boy. What else was there to do?" came in Payne's smoke-thickened voice, close at hand. "No, I can't shake just yet, thank you. Look at those vamps, having the time of their lives. What time is it anyway? Where's Mrs. Leighton?"

"Here, sir. Can I do anything?" and the good woman's matronly silhouette appeared between him and the firelight.

"Ah, there you are! I suppose we ought to take these burned-out ones home to bed. And we must have some coffee and things for the gallant fire-laddies from the Inlet. Will you see to it, please?"

"Indeed I will, sir, but I'll telephone for the doctor first. Your arms are blistered to the shoulder, sir; I never saw such a sight. You'd better be gettin' to the house yourself, sir. And Mr. Lawrence, too—hero that he is—heroes that ye all are, for the matter of that. Mercy on us, what a night!"

Adrea, partly recovered from her fright, now took command, and despatched Lavigne, who had been supporting Lawrence, to tell the firemen of Payne's invitation, while she led the little procession of homeless and wounded to Payne's house.

Lavigne, hurrying after her, offered a room in his own bungalow to herself and her aunt, but she thanked him and declined, saying she did not know what final arrangement would be made.

They found Mrs. Butler calmly seated in the

kitchen, watching the boiling of a huge coffee-pot, which she herself had found and filled. As they filed in, she insisted on their each having a cup. Mrs. Leighton had already sent for the Fairhaven doctor, and Morton was grateful, for his arms were painful in the extreme.

Adrea divided her attentions between him and Lawrence until Dr. Bradley arrived. He was a young man, not long out of the hospital, working among the Long Island villagers for the varied practice such an employment offered, and he attended to the burns of the two in a capable, business-like kind of way that impressed them both. Before his visit was ended the three were good friends.

"Come over in the morning, will you, Doctor?" Payne requested, as he made ready to leave. "Mrs. Butler is keeping up wonderfully, now—she's been the calmest of us all, but I'm afraid of a reaction. She's not at all well."

Dr. Bradley promised and departed, and just as the gray of the morning lighted the east, the score of "vamps" with their hand-engine thronged up the drive.

Payne, disregarding orders from Mrs. Leighton to "go to bed with those arms," insisted on playing host. There was hot coffee and sandwiches, by the pitcherful and the platterful, served by Adrea, who, clad in Payne's trailing raincoat, quite unconscious of the thick, girlish braid that swung about her hips, and the highly

becoming color in her cheeks, presided at the strange feast of thanksgiving.

But as they finally departed, loud in praise of their host, commenting in admiring terms on the heroism that had saved the life of his friend, and the nerve that kept him about among them when another might have been groaning in his bed, the reaction came.

Lawrence had long since been tucked away. Lavigne had departed gloomily homeward, and Mrs. Leighton was cleaning up the kitchen, which, she said, would never look like hers again, for the mud the men had tracked on her polished floor.

They met in the hall, Payne and Adrea. His arms were wadded with cotton to the shoulder. His eyebrows were entirely gone and his hair crisped above his brow. As he turned from the door, where he stood watching the aged hand-engine down the drive, his face was twisted and haggard with pain.

As she saw him, the tears sprang to her eyes, and she moved forward a step, her hands outstretched.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she whispered. "It was all my fault. I tried to stop him, but he wouldn't listen, and then you went, and I stood there, helpless. You both might have died!'

She stopped, burying her face in her hands. Payne went quickly to her, and laid his bandaged hands on her shoulder.

"There, there, child, you mustn't feel that way. It's all over and we're all alive and safe again. Don't feel so badly."

"And you!" she said. "You were so splendid. You didn't stop to think, or count the chances. You just went, and brought him back."

"It seems to me," he said, "that we owe you as great a debt. If it had not been for you, at the last, we both might have perished under the window there. You were brave, very brave, Adrea."

The graceful head drooped lower. She was very close to him, and he bent down until his lips for an instant barely touched the soft, waving hair.

"Come," he said, "I want to know all about it, how the fire started."

He led her to the great settle by the door, and drew her gently down beside him.

"I think," said Adrea, "that it must have caught around the kitchen chimney. There was a fire in the stove when we went to bed, for I had been heating water for Aunt Margaret.

"The smell of the smoke awakened me, and when I realized the room was full of it, I started to go, first, to Aunt Margaret's room, across the hall.

"When I opened my door, the flames burst in, and I couldn't get out. I put on the first thing I picked up, which was that long, silk kimono, and shouted to awaken her. She answered, and

I told her not to open her door, but to get out on the veranda roof.

"Then I got out on the roof on my side. I had forgotten that they did not connect, and when I found that I could not get to Aunt Margaret that way, I was nearly frantic. But I had been there only a few minutes when I heard Mr. Lawrence shout Then you came, and I knew it was all right."

"You are a brave girl," he said again. "The bravest I know. The last thing I remember before I fell with Lawrence, on the porch, was your face through the smoke. I remember, too, feeling quite satisfied as I felt things growing black."

Again her head bent at his words and he placed one hand, shapeless in its surgeon's wrapping, over hers.

"God bless you, little girl!" he said. "I shall never forget."

CHAPTER XI

A QUESTION IN CRANIOLOGY

ADREA VARRICK was the first astir of a late-sleeping household. It had been almost the sole fortunate circumstance of the fire, that most of her clothing had been hung in the more spacious closet of her aunt's room, and had been flung from the window through the calm presence of mind that had stood that lady in such good stead.

Adrea was therefore able to dress much as usual, though there were some things that were sadly lacking. Among these were pins for her hair, and after vainly trying to accomplish a coiffure with the few that Mrs. Leighton was able to spare, she gave it up, and braided the shining lengths into a simple plait that reached well below her waist.

She found Mrs. Leighton preparing a breakfast tray to be carried up to Lawrence, who had been ordered to remain in bed until after the doctor called.

On going to her aunt's room she found to her surprise, that she was up and nearly dressed. Adrea, fearful of the result of the night's strain, inquired anxiously how she had slept, and whether

it would not be better for her to remain quietly in her room for the morning at least.

"No, my dear," she replied, "I feel better than I have for months, and I want to be a help, not a hindrance, with two sick men in the house."

Adrea was forced to admit that Aunt Margaret was more like herself than she had been since her illness, and marveling over the miracle that apparently had been wrought, she went back to the kitchen to help Mrs. Leighton.

"Now, Miss Adrea," said that capable housewife, "don't you get the idea into your head that you two extry ones in the house are going to make me any work that I ain't able and willin' to do. I'm that glad to see you both in the land of the livin', that I'd work my hands off just to see ye smile. Yes, you can take up Mr. Lawrence's tray if you want to, but as for comin' into my kitchen and messin' up your frock and botherin' me, I just won't have it."

"Very well, Mrs. Leighton," Adrea smiled. "I'll try not be a nuisance. Is Mr. Lawrence awake?"

"Lord, yes, he's been threatenin' to get up for the last hour. The doctor telephoned that he'd be over at eleven, and we will have to keep him quiet until then, somehow."

"And Mr. Payne?"

"Mr. Payne is on deck and very, very hungry," came the voice of the owner of that name from the doorway.

Adrea looked up from the tray to see a tall figure, clothed in a gorgeous Japanese kimono. His face plainly showed the blistering effects of the fire he had so unhesitatingly faced, but his eyes were smiling, and his manner debonair.

"Good morning, Adrea. Morning, Mrs. Leighton. How is Aunt Margaret? She slept, I hope. I have just been in, curbing Allan's desire to disobey orders. That breakfast tray may quiet him. Shall I take it up?" He held out his bandaged hands. "Please excuse this garb," he "said. I couldn't get a coat on over the wadding."

"The idea!" declared Adrea. "You should not be down here at all. You are officially a hero and an invalid, and you ought to stay in your room and be waited on by inches, as all good heroes are, and as I am going, now, to wait on Mr. Lawrence. However, since you have chosen to play a prosaic part, you may go into the dining room and wait for your breakfast."

She raised the tray, scorning all offers of assistance from a man with bandaged hands, and bore it swiftly up the stairs. At her knock, Lawrence called a cheerful "Come in."

She found him sitting, propped up by pillows, and studying himself in a hand glass.

"Good morning," began Adrea. "Why, you vain creature! Actually examining yourself to see if your beauty escaped the devastating flames!"

"Yours did, at any rate," he grinned, as she

set the tray down on a table. "I never saw a more beautiful escape than you are this morning."

"Mr. Lawrence," she said, severely. "You are much too ill to pay compliments. It is never done before convalescence. Do you take one, or two lumps?"

"None at all, please. I much prefer sweets when I find them elsewhere—in dispositions for instance."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, of course, that my sweet tooth is now being more than gratified."

"Mr. Lawrence," she said with mock earnestness. "Do you really feel as well as that, or is it—delirium?"

Lawrence laughed. "Call it what you like," he said, "but for a man who has been thoroughly smoked, inside and out, I feel perfectly cured this morning."

Adrea disdained to notice the wretched pun, and laid the tray across his knees.

"Please don't go," he pleaded. "How is everybody? Your aunt, did she suffer from the shock?"

"Not at all. I can't make her out in the least. She actually seems better, this morning, than she has for weeks."

"Hm," commented Lawrence. "The shock was just enough, I suppose, to set her going right again. Such things sometimes act that way with older people. What! You're going, after all?"

"Mr. Payne has not had his breakfast," she

explained, "and with those bandaged hands he will need someone to feed him."

"But you'll come back?" he called, as she turned to go. "I shall need—oh, lots of things."

"This ward will have its share of attention," she returned, and smiling at him, closed the door.

She found Payne and her aunt on the sunny veranda chatting like old friends, and as they went in to breakfast Mrs. Butler spoke of the picture, and asked if she might not see it.

"Indeed, yes," Payne replied, and led the way through the studio.

As he uncovered the canvas, Mrs. Butler uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Oh, Mr. Payne, it is wonderful!" she cried. "It is her mother over again. How many times I have seen her sitting just like that, with a letter in her hand, and that look in her eyes.

"Dear," she said to Adrea, her eyes filling, "you should be proud to look like her. Her soul was as beautiful as her face."

They moved on to the breakfast-room, where Mrs. Leighton was waiting and impatient. Payne clumsily tried to shell an egg, until Adrea established herself as his assistant, and though he made light of his burns, an involuntary wince, now and then as he raised his arm, told her that he was actually suffering more than he cared to admit.

"How will you be able to paint with those muffled fingers, Mr. Payne?" Mrs. Butler asked, as she watched his attempts at eating.

"I've been wondering that, myself," he replied. "I fear that Lavigne will have to have his innings until I get rid of these swaddlings."

A shadow crossed Adrea's face. She had not thought of that, and the necessity of more sittings than usual with Lavigne did not please her.

As they finished and sought the veranda again, Doctor Bradley drove up and hailed them with a cheery greeting.

"How are all the fire sufferers?" he called, as he tied his horse and came up the walk. "Sleep at all, Payne?"

Payne was forced to admit that he had passed better nights.

"I expected to find you in bed," the doctor said. "Any fever? Let's see," and he popped a thermometer under Payne's tongue before he could dodge.

"And here is Mrs. Butler, the best of all of you," he continued. "You won't need any further attention from me, or I miss my guess. How's Lawrence, Miss Varrick? From what I see, there's no need to ask about you."

He looked at the thermometer and announced that Payne's temperature was practically normal. "Nothing but superficial burns" he said. "Keep the bandages on for a few days."

And he went busily up the stairs, two steps at a time. He found Lawrence sitting up in bed, smoking a cigarette.

"I should think you got enough of that inside

of you last night to satisfy you for a while," he commented as he walked in.

"Hello, Bradley. I feel fine. When are you going to let me up?"

"That depends,' said the doctor. "Let's have a look. You're getting off pretty lucky for a non-professional smoke-eater," he remarked as he finished his examination. "No cough?"

"Not much, but rather sore inside," and Lawrence touched his chest.

"Naturally. Well, stay quiet to-day and I'll have a look at you in the morning."

Lawrence protested, pleading urgent business in town.

"You'll have urgent business at a hospital if you don't do as I tell you. A man who can lie here and be nursed by a girl like Miss Varrick, but who wants to get back to a stuffy office in a New York skyscraper is difficult to please, to put it mildly."

Bradley got up to go, but Lawrence put out a hand. "Don't hurry," he said. "I want to ask you something. You saw that chap, Lavigne, last night, didn't you?"

"The man with the queer eyes? Yes, I noticed him at the house, here. Why?"

"What sort would you call him? I mean, where would you place him, categorically—as a type?"

Dr. Bradley sat down and cocked one leg over the other.

"Why?" he asked.

"I want to know," replied Lawrence. "You must have seen all kinds during your hospital service. I have seen many in my practice of law. Where would you place this one?"

"Hm, let's see if I remember him correctly. Greenish eyes, one larger than the other and set higher; ears too low and too far back; practically no posterior cranial development—sounds rather criminal, doesn't it?"

"Well?" prompted Lawrence.

"Of course," went on the doctor, "I should have to know the man, talk with him and study him before I could give an intelligent opinion of his mental make-up. There are plenty of men going around with murderers' heads on their shoulders, who never even thought of committing a crime."

"But who would be perfectly capable of committing one if the motive were present?"

"Exactly. However, there's no predestination about it. A man with the wickedest looking skull I ever saw was a well-known philanthropist; still, the fact remains that most of the criminals of a certain type show cranial characteristics more or less alike."

"And Lavigne?"

"Well," admitted the physician, "yes, he has them, but I shouldn't want to say that they meant anything, unless, of course, he already has a record."

"No," laughed Lawrence, "he hasn't any record that I know of."

After the doctor had gone, Lawrence lay thinking of Lavigne's stolen view of Payne's work. He was not surprised to find that Bradley's interpretation of his characteristic physical deviations from the normal coincided with his own. More than ever he wished to put someone in the house on guard against possible further visits of this kind, with possibly more serious results.

But, as he turned the matter over in his mind, he reflected that, with the new additions to the household, in the persons of Adrea and her aunt, there would be less opportunity for malicious mischief. Someone was sure to be about the place. Mrs. Butler, he considered, would be an admirable and unwitting watch-dog.

In view of this, he decided not to speak, for he knew Payne would call the idea preposterous, on its face, and Adrea, if she shared his fear, would be made vastly uncomfortable in her enforced relations with Lavigne.

His thoughts were interrupted by Payne and Adrea themselves, who came to congratulate him on the doctor's report of his condition.

The talk drifted naturally to the fire and its consequences, not the least of which, to Adrea, had been the loss of her violin.

"If I hadn't been such a duffer you might have helped us on to convalescence with your bow, Miss Adrea," said Lawrence.

"If I hadn't made you go into that burning room after it, Mr. Lawrence," she returned with a quiver in her voice, "you wouldn't be lying there now, and Mr. Payne wouldn't be trying to make us believe that burns do not hurt. I shall never, never forgive myself. It was so selfish and thoughtless—and see what came of it."

She threw out her hands in a little gesture of commiseration.

"Please don't, Miss Adrea," pleaded Lawrence. "It wasn't selfish or thoughtless. It looked easy enough, and it was your dearest possession. Mort has told me the tory of it. If I'd only known then, perhaps I could have tried harder."

Lawrence saw that the loss of the instrument was a real grief to the girl, and forebore to pain her with the subject further, but a thought came to his mind that seemed to give him some measure of satisfaction, for he smiled over it more than once that day.

The following morning, Dr. Bradley allowed him to get up. Payne's arms and hands were still kept in bandages, and Adrea, at Lavigne's request, went unwillingly for a sitting. At noon Lawrence received a telegram which only his presence in the city could answer, and though Dr. Bradley rather grudgingly gave him leave, he went to New York in the afternoon. Adrea and her aunt were comfortably installed in separate rooms in the big house, and the little colony settled down into its quiet again.

CHAPTER XII

LAVIGNE SEES A VISION

FROM the moment when, in that first surreptitious instant, Julius Lavigne had stood before Payne's easel and had taken in, at one sweeping, comprehensive glance, the study of Adrea Varrick sitting on the stone bench in the rose-garden, he had felt that the hand of Fate was against him.

His artist's eye had noted, even in those few seconds, as Lawrence, too, had seen, that this was the work of a master.

From the absolute truth expressed in the drawing, and from what he knew of Payne's natural ability to handle color, he felt in his heart that his own talents were to be tested to the utmost to produce, from the same model, anything that would be comparable. This knowledge, coming as it did on the heels of his financial losses, had set a bitterness against Payne growing within him.

He had tried, had striven, honestly, painfully, to produce on his own canvas the same ideal of innocence and beauty that Payne, apparently, with an off-hand lightness of touch that seemed to him incredible, had created, almost casually, in a few strokes.

It was the first time he had ever been moved by such an ideal—the first time he had ever really tried to purify his motif into such a fineness of line and color, that it should be apparent to the most superficial, as well as to the most critical observer, that here was a work so simple, so idyllic, so different in its very essence from that which had heretofore borne his name, that no longer should he be called "the man who sees wrong."

He was aware that he had gained this title, even among the few whom he flattered himself he could call his friends. But never had it been brought home to him as on the day Payne had accused him of making a caricature of a young girl's soul. Stung by the implied challenge, he had put forth his best efforts to retrieve himself —and he had failed. The very purity that he now sought had baffled him.

The pose that Payne had chosen, the expression of the eyes, the slightly-parted lips, which seemed to repeat the words of the letter that lay in the hand, had haunted him, day and night. He could think of no other attitude in which he could place the girl that now would satisfy him.

What, then? Was he to choose the second best, and follow on, struggling for recognition in the footsteps of this young upstart, this illustrator of magazines, this scribbler of stories, who had chosen to enter the lists with him, and had challenged and beaten him at the very beginning, in this greatest trial of his career?

He longed for another sight of that study in black and white. He knew that Payne had already begun to use his palette, and the grim hope rose within him that the unaccustomed medium of oil might work disaster. So strong became the desire, that he had watched and waited, and time after time saw his plans to visit the studio come to naught. From a secluded corner of his deep veranda he had even brought a pair of powerful binoculars in play to inform himself of the movements of Payne's household.

On the Saturday of Lawrence's arrival he had kept an even closer vigil, and at last had been rewarded.

He saw Mrs. Leighton leave the house and go to Adrea's cottage. Then, after an interminable length of time, he watched Payne and Adrea, as they left the studio and walked down the sloping lawn to the boat-house. He saw them in the boat, headed up the Inlet, and knew the coast was clear. He prepared a plausible story against the unexpected return of Mrs. Leighton, and left his bungalow with hastening steps.

The studio was closed and locked, but the double doors from the veranda side opened at a sharp wrench.

Lavigne stepped inside, and walking straight to the easel, flung off the scarf. The light on the picture was bad, and grasping it by the lower corners, he raised the canvas and turned it slightly.

As the full rays from the wide, north window caught the picture, the shimmer of fresh paint was suddenly eliminated, and the beauty of the sitting figure impinged upon Lavigne's consciousness, photographed there, in that instant, as the winking eye of a camera admits an image to be imprinted indelibly upon a roll of film.

He started, nearly letting the stretcher fall. Trembling from head to foot he placed it, waveringly, back upon the easel and drew his hand slowly across his forehead. The haunting perfection of the drawing, that had remained in his mind ever since that first view, had not been exaggerated or idealized by his imagination, as he had half hoped. Here was the reality, more exquisite, even, than he had thought, now matured and amplified until the most ignorant, most casual observer could not fail to see its promise.

Lavigne changed his position so that the light fell properly upon the easel and stood there, gazing dully, with fascinated eyes.

Payne had evidently spent most of his labors, so far, upon the head. The cheeks glowed with youthful color, so delicate that it almost seemed to come and go. The eyes, deep, expressive, vital, shone with light and life, and the rose-hued lips, perfect in their modeling, and just parted, as if repeating the words of the letter in her hand, appeared almost to move in forming the word they were about to utter. The hair, piled high upon the head, seemed to hold stray sunbeams deep within its fragrant masses.

And yet, even now, the portrait was scarcely more than a study, in which suggestion took the place of actual detail, and whose potential loveliness lay in the utter sincerity and apparent lack of effort which had been required of its creator.

As Lavigne gazed, a hard look of hate came to his eyes, driving before it any glance of real admiration that had lurked in them unawares. He thought of his own attempt to express what Payne had found so easy—his sincere effort to draw Adrea Varrick as she really was, as Payne had seen and drawn her; and the curl of his lips, as he thought of the studied, lifeless work that stood upon his own easel, made his smile venomous in its grimness.

Suddenly he dropped the covering and turned away. With head bent, scarcely looking to right or left, he went straight to his own studio and there ripped the cloth from his own picture. In better control of himself he stood before it for many minutes, with eyes that searched out, line by line, the faults of which Payne's portrait accused him.

Bitter thoughts surged at his heart, filling his breast with the tumult of despair, hatred and fear. He knew that his picture could never hang beside Payne's—could never be considered with it. He doubted if it could even be given a place on the walls of the Wostenholm salon. He could see at a glance its stilted insincerity.

With a groan he dropped into a chair and closed

his eyes. Gradually his mind, burning itself out by the very fierceness of its aroused emotion, became duller, and then, after a time, slowly, insidiously, haltingly, creeping like a serpent hidden in the tangles of tall grass, his imagination regained its sway.

Suddenly, it unfolded to him an idea, a plan. Lavigne sat up and looked again on the canvas he had just condemned. No longer did he see the listless figure with the vapid, soulless face of a chromo, that had looked with foolish uncertainty at him but a moment ago. In its stead he saw something else, clean-cut in its outlines, vivid and complete to the uttermost detail.

For an instant Lavigne had stood as if transfixed, staring at the vision. His eyes were on the half-completed picture, but if they had been turned toward a blank wall, it would have been the same. He saw the thing that he would paint, the thing he knew he could paint—the thing, that, by its very power, should compel the attention of the beholder, whatever might be his will, and hold it, even as Beatrice Cenci and the Mona Lisa had held their beholders through the centuries.

Unconsciously, he straightened his shoulders and threw back his head. He was not looking at the easel now, but still he saw the vision, standing out in all the fullness of form and color, vibrant with life, driving back into the shadows the figure of Adrea Varrick, as he had already

drawn her, still keeping the pose, but vivifying her into a living, breathing woman, the perfect antithesis of the portrait which he had attempted, and in which he had so miserably failed.

Like a man in a dream, he seized his palette and mixed fresh colors. He began to work, excitedly, feverishly, but withal decisively. He scraped out here, added the merest touch there, changed a flattened curve to a more rounded outline, never feeling the want of a living model, painting steadily, purposefully and surely, looking the while nowhere but into his own brain for the image that he sought to reproduce.

Voices outside the bungalow broke the spell and brought Lavigne with a start, back to immediate things. He dropped his tools and had barely time to sink into a chair and pick up a book, when Payne and Lawrence entered. The first thought that came to him was that they had discovered his intrusion into Payne's studio, and had come to accuse him of it, but an instant's reflection told him that Payne, even if he suspected, would never come to pick a quarrel over such a matter of bad faith.

He tried to appear at ease, and succeeded fairly well, though he cursed the interruption and the consequent loss of the precious, already-fading daylight.

The moment they had gone, Lavigne tore the covering from the canvas and looked at his work. Yes, there could be no doubt. It was begun at last.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VENOM OF THE SERPENT

THE fire, in disabling Payne, had played well into Lavigne's hands, for Adrea, since she had no other call upon her time, consented to pose each day, and unconscious of the motives that had apparently awakened him to new life, she sat hour after hour while he painted steadily on.

She wondered many times, as she sat on the low model-stand, at the change in the man. He had become taciturn, absorbed, and frequently irritable.

She began to watch him more closely, and was surprised to find how little apparent use he was making of her. Sometimes, for the better part of an hour, Lavigne hardly glanced at her. Also, he allowed her much greater liberty in the pose, and, for the most part, she was able to avoid looking at the picture of "The Betrothal," which from the first she had so disliked. Often, for a whole sitting, nothing passed between her and Lavigne but the most commonplace civilities. The man seemed to forget her very presence, and at times she felt that she was almost an intruder.

One day a strange thing happened. She had come early to the studio, and found that Lavigne

was not ready for her. It was a warm morning, and she sat down for a moment to rest before going to change her cool, white frock for the bespangled gown she had to wear.

As she sank upon the chair, she dropped unconsciously into the very attitude in which Payne was painting her. At that instant Lavigne came across the room. She saw him start, and fix her intently with his strange, unequal eyes. They seemed to glow greener than ever, as, for a moment, he faced her. Then he turned abruptly, and crossing the studio, disappeared into the court of the bungalow.

He had not spoken a word, and since her posture, as she sat bending a little forward, one hand upon her knee, her head slightly lifted, was entirely unstudied, she did not even surmise it was that which had so affected him.

In a few minutes he returned, but she saw at once that his manner was completely at odds with the eager, almost feverish mood in which of late she had been accustomed to find him. He did not uncover the easel, and when she emerged from the adjoining room, dressed for the model-stand, she found him sitting on a chair before the veiled picture, staring at it blankly. At the rustling of her gown he looked up, as if startled at her appearance.

"I am not feeling well, to-day, Miss Varrick. I slept badly, and I think we will not attempt anything this morning."

She looked at him with some concern, not because she had the slightest personal interest in the man, but because he was evidently suffering in some way, and her quick sympathy was aroused as it might have been for a street dog with a hurt paw.

"I am so sorry," she said. "I hope that it will pass off before night. Mr. Payne expects Mr. Lawrence down for the week-end and he has planned a little celebration in the studio this evening to mark, as he says, the end of 'the heroic' period. His burns are quite well again, you know, and he wished me to ask you to come without fail, and join us in the jubilee."

Lavigne's thoughts were a far cry from thanksgiving and merry-makings, but he reflected that he could give no adequate excuse for a flat refusal, and agreed to come if his indisposition should pass.

"I am sure it will," Adrea smiled back at him as she went to slip once more into her own dainty garments. "Mr. Payne is very anxious to have you to come."

When she had gone, Lavigne closed the studio door and lifted the cover from his picture. In the instant's view he had had of Adrea, as she sat taking unknowingly the very pose of Payne's portrait, it had seemed to him that his own vision, that weird of his imagination from which he had been painting his picture, had been dimmed, blurred, and partly dispersed.

In that moment he had seen her as Payne always saw her—the clear beauty of her features, the simple, girlish lines of her figure, the purity and innocence of her expression, the truth shining in her face.

It was as if a great and gentle hand had been laid upon his eyes, and they had opened under the touch, to see, in one transitory flash of clear white light, the hideous falsity of his own endeavor.

It staggered him. He strove to crush the feeling down, tried to sneer at it and mortify it and tear it out of his heart, but he could not. He groaned aloud as he stood before the figure of the woman he had made, for in that single moment he realized that his trickster's art, wonder-working, even as he knew it to be, could never for an instant stand beside the simple, honest sincerity that was Payne's sign-manual.

"God!" he cried, in an agony of despair. "Can I do neither one thing nor the other? Is it to lose faith in myself, now, that I have worked, and dreamed, and treasured my vision in my breast? Have this man and this girl come to be a blight upon my life? No, by God it shall not be! I am myself! I will paint as I choose, and people may see and look askance at each other, but they shall turn again to Lavigne and his work. They shall bow before it, because there will be nothing else in the world with which it can be compared!"

He turned, and paced the room with quick strides, his face tortured into strange lines, his mouth twitching, his hands trembling, his whole body shaking with nervous tension. He muttered to himself as he walked. Suddenly he stopped at the threshold of the door that led to the veranda, and shook his clenched fist at the house that sheltered Payne. He was his enemy, this man! He was the only obstacle that stood between him and fame; for without Payne's completed picture to hang beside his, and by its utter truth to foil and give him the lie direct, his fortune would be made.

He knew it, and as he stood, his lips writhing with the bitterness of hatred, he swore a great oath that this rival picture should never reach completion.

"May his hand wither, may his eyes become sightless, may he be stricken with palsy, may he—God, what am I saying? How shall I stop him?"

Lavigne dropped upon the swinging couch, his head between his hands. "How shall I stop him?" he muttered, over and over again, his body swaying back and forth, the very rhythm of his unconscious motion and the oft-repeated question adding to his self-aroused and almost frenzied hatred of his rival.

"Payne's picture *must not, shall not* be painted. How shall I prevent it?"

It led his thoughts in a search for the means

to accomplish his end. Even physical violence, perhaps murder, was in his heart. But at bottom Lavigne was a coward. He would never choose any plan that did not include safety for himself and freedom from suspicion.

Yet, he must solve the problem somehow. He might succeed in defacing the unfinished portrait; but there was ample time for Payne to commence and finish another. He might, in some way, prevent Adrea Varrick from posing; but this would keep her also from his own studio, and he needed her. Besides, whatever he should choose must include Payne—Payne, whom he feared and therefore hated, hated now with an unreasoning, deadly hate that grew and grew until it completely mastered him, filled his brain to bursting with its venom, and left him writhing insanely in its clutch.

Slowly he rose and walked into the studio again. Going straight to the easel he threw aside the covering. He stood for a long minute looking fixedly at his work, the ugly grimace still distorting his mouth, his eyes cold and hard and evil.

With Payne's picture out of the way, what might not this effort bring him? Already he saw it, surrounded by the eager throng at the Wostenholm; already he could hear the whisperings and the surprised comment, the admiration, the wonder, the half-expressed, but deeply felt awe that his master-work would inspire.

And as he stood there he vowed that this dream should come true; that no other conception of this young woman's face should be set forth for comparison. There should be no canvas of Payne's to foil his work.

CHAPTER XIV

LAWRENCE PAYS A DEBT

LAWRENCE arrived in his car in mid-afternoon and found no one at home but Mrs. Leighton, who told him that Payne had taken Miss Varrick and her aunt up the Sound for an afternoon's spin. Having nothing to do, he walked across to Lavigne's, only to be met at the bungalow entrance by the servant, who told him that her master was trying to sleep off a bad headache.

Though Lawrence, as he crossed the field, had caught a glimpse of Lavigne's figure dodging back into the shadow of the veranda, he merely blinked at the information, and made his way back, realizing that it was rather a relief than a disappointment to find the man "not at home."

He took the path by the shore, and as he approached the boat-house, he made out a black speck, far off in the blue water, which grew larger even as he watched it. The sound of a steady, pulsating beat of a motor throbbed in the air, and by the time he reached the landing he could discern the craft's occupants. They saw him almost as soon, and in a few minutes

there was a waving of hands, as the returning party greeted him from afar.

"Hello, Allan," Payne called, as he shut off his engine. "Didn't expect you so soon, or we should have been at home. Watch the new pilot make a landing."

Adrea, her eyes whipped by shining streamers of hair, her eyes dancing, stood at the wheel and brought the craft broadside to the slip with a hand so skilful that the jar would hardly have crushed an egg

"Bravo!" Lawrence cried. "I know some ferry-boat skippers who ought to take a few lessons from you."

He gave her a hand ashore and turned to assist Mrs. Butler.

"And Mrs. Butler, too, brown as a fisherman, and looking twenty years younger, on my honor!"

"Hardly that, Mr. Lawrence," she said as he handed her to the slip, "but I really think I've taken the half of it off my feelings, thanks to Mr. Payne and all of you. And you?" she inquired with a kindly anxiety in her tone, "you have felt no ill effects from the smoke?"

"None at all," answered Lawrence. "New York soot and many years of cigarettes made it easier for me, I suspect. Well, Mort," he went on, turning to Payne, who was tying the boat, "you are out of bandages and off the wounded hero list, I see. Has he been a good patient, Miss Adrea?"

"Not very," said the girl. "He would insist on looking under the bandages so often, that I thought we should have to send for a straight-jacket, or manacles, or something. He really ought not to be using his hands as he does. I'm sure they're still painful; but he insisted on taking us out to-day, and threatened to go alone if we didn't come."

They all walked up to the house together to find Mrs. Leighton ready with tea in the rose-garden.

It was just before dinner that Lawrence, descending the stairs, heard the notes of a piano, softly played, and stopping at the landing saw Adrea seated at the instrument in the long room beyond the hall. He thought a moment, and then went quietly back to his room, returning with something in his hands. He reached the bottom of the staircase quietly, and leaving his burden there, entered the room. Adrea heard his step and turned.

"Go on," said Lawrence. "Please do. I'm very fond of that thing. What is it?"

"It is MacDowell's 'To a Wild Rose,'" she answered. "Mr. Payne is very fond of it too, but it should always be played on a violin. The piano robs it of half its daintiness."

"I don't know," said Lawrence. "I never heard it played, but I should like to—on the violin, I mean."

"Ah," said the girl, a shadow crossing her face, "I wish I could."

She stopped, suddenly, with just the suspicion of a catch in her voice, and bending over the keys recommenced the little melody.

Lawrence stepped swiftly and silently back into the hall, and came into the room again, bearing the object he had left outside.

"Miss Adrea," he said, "I know you will never cease to grieve for the gift of Herr Kinderfreund. It was precious for many reasons. It cannot be replaced, of course, but—" he hesitated, and Adrea turned, to see him holding in his hands the black leather case of a violin.

"Please take it," he said, "from a friend."

Adrea had risen, and as he placed the case in her hands it seemed to him that she took it as a mother might take back her child from the hands of another. Her eyes were bright with tears as she looked at him, and for a moment she did not speak.

"Don't, Adrea," he said as he saw the refusal of the words to come. "Just play the 'Wild Rose' for me."

He took the case from her and opened it, laying the instrument itself in her arms. She fingered it, stroking its satiny surface with the palm of her hand.

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence," she cried, "what can I say? I can never thank you for such a gift as this!"

"Please don't!" he said. "I didn't want you to be without it, because I know how it is with people who love such things."

She stood under the tall lamp by the piano, caressing the violin against her breast, her fingers, which trembled a little, already working unconsciously at the keys, and a rosy color coming and going in her cheeks.

Suddenly she took a step forward and laid one slender hand impulsively on his sleeve.

"Why are you so kind to me?" she said, looking up at him with sweetly serious eyes, and speaking with tremulous lips. "What have I ever done—what can I ever do to deserve it all?"

"Nothing," he replied, taking the hand upon his arm in both his. "Nothing at all, beyond continuing to be the dear girl you are and playing your 'Wild Rose' for me, and also," he added, drawing down his brows and looking at her in mock command, "you are to remember that I am not 'Mr. Lawrence'—to my friends."

She blushed the deeper at this, and the seriousness in her eyes melted in a smile as she tightened her bow and began to play. As she finished the first measures, Payne, with Mrs. Butler on his arm, came softly into the room and stood near the door, listening. As the last high, sweet note died away, Adrea felt their presence, and turned.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she cried, running to her aunt. "Mr. Lawrence has made me the happiest girl on Long Island."

As she spoke, Payne, standing a little back in the shadow of a *portière*, started slightly, and looked questioningly at Allan.

"He brought it to me from New York," continued the girl. "It's a perfectly wonderful instrument. He won't even let me thank him."

A look of partial relief spread over Payne's face, and he came forward.

"But, my dear," Aunt Margaret was saying, "I am not sure you ought to accept such a great gift. Young women in my day were not allowed to——"

"Now, Aunt Margaret," protested Lawrence, "if a sick man, or a man who has been sick, can't show his appreciation of his faithful and self-sacrificing nurse, what is the use in ever being a sick man? Besides, I have already exacted payment. She has played for me, and I am no longer to be Mr. Lawrence. Isn't it so, Adrea?"

"Yes—Allan," she said, and they both laughed, with Payne and Mrs. Butler joining in.

Mrs. Leighton appeared, announcing dinner, and with Adrea promising nocturnes and serenades afterward, they entered the dining room.

"Do let's have our coffee in the other room," Adrea said, as dessert was served. "I confess I can hardly wait to feel the strings under my fingers again."

For an hour there was music, Adrea with the violin tucked lovingly beneath her rounded chin, Payne at the piano, and Lawrence and Mrs. Butler as audience.

"It was really very wrong of you, I suppose," confided Mrs. Butler to Lawrence during an inter-

lude between selections; "but you have made her so happy that I shall not say anything more. Poor girl, she has wept herself to sleep more than once since the fire."

"I'm only too glad to have hit on the right thing," Lawrence replied. "We all love Adrea—no one could help it—and anything that brings her pleasure is a privilege to do."

But the concert was all too soon interrupted by the arrival of Lavigne, who walked in upon them as the musicians were just ending Tschaikovsky's Melodie.

"Ah, please don't let me interrupt," he said smoothly, as Payne offered his hand and a chair, "I'm very fond of the violin and piano together."

He sat down, but the spirit for music seemed suddenly to have departed from Adrea; for she confessed herself tired and laid the violin away in its case. Soon they all wandered to the studio, and the talk had begun to drift in desultory channels, when the sound of a horse on the drive sent Payne hastening to the hall.

"Come in, Doctor," they heard him exclaim. "I was beginning to fear you had been called away." And in another moment he appeared with Dr. Bradley.

"And this is a convalescence party, Payne tells me," said the little man, briskly, as he made his way across the room, shaking hands with everybody. "You're a pretty husky looking lot of convalescents. And you, Miss Varrick," he

exclaimed, stepping in front of Adrea, "you don't look as if nursing were in any way disagreeable to you."

"You're just in time, Bradley," called Payne from the door. "We were just going to start something. Allan, come along and help bring the beer."

"Can't I help?" asked Adrea. "Please let me do something."

"That's right, let us all help," the doctor joined in. "What do you want? Plates, and things? I'll follow you, Miss Varrick."

They left the studio to rummage the butler's pantry for dishes, and the sideboard for silver, and Mrs. Butler soon followed to protect Mrs. Leighton's domain from masculine onslaughts, thus leaving Lavigne for a moment alone in the studio.

Payne's easel had been pushed into a corner, out of the way, with the canvas toward the wall. Lavigne's eyes sought it, longingly, and he had an intense desire to uncover the picture, but he forebore, fearing their return, and moodily lighted a cigarette.

The others were soon back with their plunder, which included a chafing dish and a heaping bowl of lobster-meat, over which Adrea at once established herself at the big table.

"Allan," she said, looking at Lawrence a little shyly at the use of the new name, "will you get me a small pitcher of hot water for the bottom

pan? Mr. Payne, have you some alcohol for the lamp?"

"There's some in the cupboard by the fireplace. Let the doctor get it for you," Payne answered, appearing with his hands full of bottled Bass.

Dr. Bradley searched the cupboard and brought forth a quart flask, nearly full.

"Deodorized Methyl Alcohol, Poison," he read aloud from the label.

CHAPTER XV

A SOUND IN THE NIGHT

"DEODORIZED methyl alcohol," Dr. Bradley repeated, as he carried the bottle to Adrea at the table. "That's horrible stuff. Shall I pour it for you?"

"Why horrible?" Adrea asked, unscrewing the cap of the lamp beneath the chafing-dish. "I have always heard it was a boon to humanity."

"You are thinking of denatured alcohol, which is a very different thing," Bradley replied. "This stuff is as venomous as a rattlesnake, and much more common—therefore more dangerous. The ordinary wood alcohol has a distinctive odor, which in itself is a warning, but this, with the odor taken away, might easily be mistaken for grain, or ethyl alcohol, and used internally.

"There are reports in the papers almost every day, where the mistake has been made, usually by drunkards. It kills them most effectively as a rule. The dealers, where liquor selling is illicit, sometimes, through ignorance, use it in concocting the whiskey they sell. It's much cheaper, you see, paying no government tax."

"Perhaps," remarked Mrs. Butler, rather primly

for her, "even the deaths of these miserable persons may be for the best, in the warning they publish."

"Perhaps," doubtfully agreed the doctor, "but I came across a case the other day, where the agency of the stuff as the hand of Providence was not quite so apparent."

"Indeed, and what was that?"

"I have a patient in the next town, an elderly man, a hard worker and a useful, honest citizen. For years he has been in the habit of taking, near bed-time, one generous, solitary drink of whiskey. It makes him feel good inside, he says, and sends him quickly to sleep. About a month ago the man from whom he had always bought his whiskey, died, and the business was wound up, so that he was forced to send into town for his regular supply of liquor. He bought a gallon jug, as usual, and continued taking his bed-time drink.

"A week ago he called me to see him, and complained that his eyesight was suddenly growing dim. His eyes had always been perfectly good, and from what examination I could make, I saw nothing wrong. I advised him to go to an oculist in town, and he did. The specialist examined him thoroughly and found that the optic nerve was affected and that nothing could save his sight. The next day the light went out for that man, forever.

"I was at a complete loss to understand the cause, for he had always been strong, and in

perfect health. Day before yesterday I happened to think of the whiskey, the new brand he had been drinking. I took what was left in the jug and analyzed it. There is the result!"

As he spoke, Dr. Bradley took from his pocket-book a slip of paper, and laid it on the table.

Adrea picked it up.

"Methyl alcohol! That was what made the poor man blind!"

"That was what made him blind," declared the doctor, soberly. "The strange whiskey he had bought was adulterated with this particular proportion of wood spirit—not enough to kill, but enough to destroy or cause a change in the optic nerve. I have since learned that such a proportion almost invariably acts in this way. There are cases on record of persons going blind from merely the inhalation of the fumes."

"How horrible!" cried the girl. "Do you think we ought to use it? I feel already as if that lobster were a death-feast."

"Adrea!" cried her aunt. "How can you talk so? I'm sure it smells very good."

The lamp under the chafing-dish at the other end of the table, as if angry at the exposure of its character, suddenly flamed up, and the burning fluid, running over, spread in a little sea of hot, blue flames over the tray.

"Quick," cried Payne, "open the door, somebody, or we shall have the place on fire!"

Seizing the pan of cooking lobster, he placed

it quickly on the floor, and grasping the tray in a napkin, rushed with it from the room and deposited it safely outside, where it harmlessly burned itself out.

The little flurry of excitement served as a halting point in the discussion of the noxious qualities of methylated spirit. The lamp was refilled, this time with grain alcohol; the Bass bottles popped cheerfully, and the party became gay.

The remainder of the evening passed quickly, and it was after eleven when Dr. Bradley rose to go.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that my good-night is also to be a good-bye for the present summer, though I hope you will like the Inlet well enough to come back another year. You have been a bright spot in the dull gray of a country doctor's life."

To a chorus of surprised protests he explained:

"I am sailing for Hamburg, to-morrow, for a short course at Vienna and Berlin. I feel that my people, here, are entitled to the best I can give them, since it is they, by their confidence in me, who have made the trip possible."

They showered him with congratulations and parting good wishes, and refused to let him go until his health had been drunk, standing. But it had to end at last, and the doctor found his hat and held out his hand.

They were loath to let him go, for they liked this cheery, busy little man who was spending

his hard-earned fees for the benefit of the country-folk who trusted him. Trooping with him to the gate, they offered all sorts of sage advice against the traps and pitfalls which the Old World lays for the unwary American adventurer, faring for the first time within the radius of its suave hospitality.

There was a final chorus of farewells and good wishes as the doctor drove away, and the party turned again toward the house.

"Where's Lavigne?" asked Payne, scanning the group in the light that streamed from the open door; "he hasn't gone, has he? I thought he was with us, there, at the gate."

"I saw him apparently looking for matches when we left the studio," said Lawrence. "Here he is, now."

As they mounted the steps Lavigne appeared rather suddenly from the hall, cigarette in mouth and hat in hand. He at once began his leave-taking.

"I wish to thank you all for a very pleasant evening," he said, bowing to Mrs. Butler and Adrea.

"What, Lavigne! Not going?" protested Payne. "Stop and have a good-night cigar, won't you? It's not late."

"No," said Lavigne. "I expect to go up to town on the early train, and I must get some sleep."

"Well, come over oftener in the evening, old man," urged Payne. "We ought to have lots

of little merry-makings like this, just to keep us amiable."

"Thanks," Lavigne said. "I should be more than glad to."

Adrea and her aunt retired soon after Lavigne had gone, and Lawrence and Payne, after a turn or two up and down the porch, also sought their rooms.

Adrea, whose windows opened on the flat roof of the studio wing, was a long time in going to sleep. For hours, it seemed to her, after the house had become quiet, she lay listening to the lonely, incessant call of a whip-poor-will, perched in the shrubbery of the garden. Finally her eyelids became heavy and she was just drifting into the first semi-consciousness of long-deferred sleep, when she was startled broad awake by a sound.

She was certain that a noise had disturbed her, but was unable to tell its character, or its source. The wind had risen and was rustling the trees outside. The whip-poor-will had flown away, and the house was still.

Adrea, with the uncanny feeling that comes from a sudden awakening in the dead of the night, lay perfectly still, and listened until her straining ears and quickened imagination conjured up all sorts of uncomfortable noises; the creak of a board, the rustle of a curtain, drawn against a screen by a draught of air, the swaying of the rose-vines against the house, all were puzzling and unaccountable.

Then there came a louder sound from the direction of the studio below. It was like the closing of a door.

The ability, after any puzzling occurrence, to relate cause and effect, often gives instant relief to the human mind, and no sooner did the meaning of the noise come to Adrea than she was out of bed.

Slipping on a silken robe and a pair of soft moccasins, she opened her bedroom door and stepped out into the hall.

The midnight mystery was shattered. It was nothing but the long glass doors of the studio, which Payne must have neglected to close and fasten. The rising wind was swinging them open, and shut. So, smiling to herself at the thought of the little lecture she must deliver over the breakfast-table, Adrea glided down the stairs and through the hall.

The door into the studio was closed, but she opened it, unhesitatingly, and entered.

Light enough from the starry night outside came through the great north window, and the girl quickly crossed the long room to the veranda end, picking her way, familiarly, among the furniture. As she expected, the long doors were open and were swinging gently to and fro in the breeze.

She closed and secured them, turning the key in the lock, and then retraced her way as easily as she had come.

In bed once more, her mind at rest, she composed herself for the remainder of the broken night. She had not lain five minutes when, with a start that sent a chill along her spine, and almost a scream to her lips, she heard, for the third time, the sound of a closing door.

Thoroughly frightened at last, Adrea leaped from her bed, and bare-footed, huddling her robe about her as she went, she rushed from her room, and reaching Payne's door, almost threw herself against it.

"Who's there?" came Payne's voice.

"It's Adrea," she panted out. "Oh, Allan! Morton! Please come. There's someone in the house!"

In an instant, Payne's door opened, and a second later, Lawrence's. The two men sprang out into the hall, Payne in his pajamas, and Lawrence, the calmer of the two, hurriedly attired in a bath-robe.

Adrea, trembling from head to foot, stood in the middle of the hall.

"There's somebody in the studio," she was repeating. "I thought it was the wind, swinging the doors, and I went down once and closed them. Just now I heard the door open and close again, and——"

Lawrence ran to her as she swayed, and threw his arm about her shoulders. The kimono dropped to the floor and he picked it up and clumsily tried to wrap it about her.

Payne dived into his room, and reappeared with an electric flash-light in one hand and something that glittered in the other. Aunt Margaret's door opened an inch or two, and her voice was heard, asking what was the matter.

Payne was already at the head of the stairs.

"Come on, Allan. Let's see who the bogey is," he said, and disappeared.

"Go in with Aunt Margaret, Adrea," Lawrence urged, leading her to Mrs. Butler's door. "We'll catch him, if he's there."

"Oh, please, Allan, both of you, be careful. I'm sure there *is* some one."

"Then he's the one to be careful," Lawrence replied, leaving her and running to the stairs.

Standing with the door ajar, and trying to reassure Aunt Margaret, she heard the men open the studio door. Then there was silence, and she breathed a sigh of relief, for she knew that Payne was sweeping every corner of the great room with his torch, and without result.

She heard them talking in low tones as they walked about, examining. She heard Lawrence chuckle and step out on the veranda. They were laughing at her, she thought, making a joke of her fright.

Running back to her room, she found her slippers, and in spite of her aunt's fearsome protest, hurried downstairs.

Payne had lighted the studio, and sat on the big table swinging his revolver by its trigger-guard.

"I heard somebody laugh," Adrea said, accusingly, as she entered. "So I came down to see about it."

Both men smiled.

"Lobster," hinted Lawrence.

"Too much story-telling," grinned Payne.

Adrea stamped her foot. "Neither," she said. "I wasn't asleep at all, that is, not really. I lay awake a long time, and had just begun to doze when I heard the door. It woke me up and I listened, and heard it again. Then I thought, of course, that you, being notably careless about such matters, had left it open. So I came down here and shut and locked it. How did you find it just now?"

Lawrence started. "It was just ajar," he said.

Adrea turned triumphantly to Payne. "Now, laugh," she said.

But Payne did not laugh. Instead, he slid off the table and came over to where the girl stood, half-defiantly, with her wondrous hair all loose and shimmering over the silk of her robe. And he put out his hand and took hers.

"Adrea, you're a brave girl. I beg your pardon. There is nothing whatever to laugh about."

Adrea colored a little, and pushed the encroaching locks away from her face with her free hand.

"It was Allan who laughed, I think," she said, with the ghost of a twinkle in her eyes.

"By George, Adrea," said Lawrence, "I did laugh, but I'm not laughing now. Whoever it was must have been in this room when you came down, and he must have crouched and watched you go to that door and lock it. It's a wonder he let you do it. Whew! It nearly takes my breath away."

All three stood silent for a moment. Then Lawrence picked up the electric torch and crossed over to the long doors. With Payne's magnifying glass and the bright light, he made a minute examination of the door.

"Finger-prints," he explained. "But I can't make out anything. There are some, but they are all so blurred and mixed up that they're valueless for purposes of identification."

He moved about the room, peering in the same manner at different objects, paying particular attention to the easel, on which rested Adrea's portrait.

But soon he gave it up. Nothing tangible was to be seen. Payne took an inventory of the room's belongings. Nothing was missing. Yet somebody had been in the room. That much was clear. Whether he had seen nothing worth the taking, or whether his plans had been interrupted, and he had been finally scared off by Adrea, was something they could only surmise.

The latter supposition seemed reasonable, Payne argued, though Lawrence objected that, knowing suspicion had not been aroused by the sound of

the door, the intruder could have safely waited until quiet was restored, and then continued the accomplishment of his purpose.

"Perhaps he had accomplished it before I came down," Adrea suggested. "He may have been in the house a long time, without my hearing him. It was, or perhaps it just seemed, many minutes between the first and second banging of the door."

This, also, sounded reasonable; but now the voices of Mrs. Butler and Mrs. Leighton were heard from the landing above, demanding to know the news, and as apparently there was nothing more to be learned, they all went upstairs to quiet the women's fears and satisfy their curiosity.

The faint first light of dawn was already streaking the east when the household finally turned in again to catch what rest was possible before the new day.

CHAPTER XVI

TRACING THE HEART-LINE

THE household was not early astir, but when finally its members gathered at the breakfast-table on the south veranda, there was much good-natured chaff about the near-adventure of the night.

"Good morning, Adrea," called Payne, as the girl came down the stairs.

"Good morning, Mr. Payne."

"So!" laughed Payne. "When danger stalks abroad, and we are nearly frightened gray, we call our friend and protector 'Morton.' But with returning daylight fear fleeth, and we return to our pinnacle of formality, and call him 'Mr. Payne'."

She stopped at the landing and regarded him with as nearly a coquettish expression as he had ever seen in her.

"No, Morton," she said, smiling; "only it is not good form to call one's 'boss' by his first name unless he asks one, is it? And you have never asked me to before not even when Allan told you you'd better."

"I—I'm not your boss," declared Payne. "I object. I like and admire you. You are a

brave girl. Not many girls would have lain and listened, half scared to death, and then gotten up and gone about shutting doors that were unaccountably open. No—I'm honored and pleased. Come down and let me tell you how pleased I am."

She laughed at him merrily, and tripped the rest of the way down the stairs to where he stood, gravely holding out his hand to her. She took it, and looked up at him with a new sort of shyness in her eyes, which at once dropped under his gaze.

Lawrence's step on the porch cut the tableau short.

"Hello, you two! Now don't tell him, Adrea, how brave you think he was. I was just exactly as brave, and besides, he had a gun, so I want my share if there are any more hero-honors being distributed. I never thought I got a fair whack the last time. Payne was laid up longer, and got lots more attention."

"Well, she called you a hero, didn't she?" demanded Payne. "And you felt so pleased over it that you went and bought her violins and things. Well, she calls me 'Morton' for this, so you needn't complain. Let's go to breakfast. Danger, they say, sharpens the appetite."

They found Mrs. Butler already busy with the coffee-urn, and sat down to a merry meal.

"Don't give Lawrence too much to eat, Adrea," Payne said, as Allan asked for a second helping

of omelette. "Hunger, you know, makes the hound's nose keen. He's been sniffing around the lawn and garden for an hour or more. Tell us what you found, old scout."

"Nothing," said Lawrence, looking disgusted. "This detective business is mostly in books, I believe. When you write a book you can put your clues in where they will do the most good, and the sleuth can pick them up whenever he needs them. In real mysteries it is different.

"Now, according to the best sellers, there ought to have been the print of a man's shoe in the grass, from which I could have at once deduced that he was afflicted with an ingrowing toe-nail, dark-brown eyes and a soiled collar, and wore no necktie. As a matter of fact, there isn't any foot-print at all. I've been all over the grass outside the veranda with a magnifying glass, and not so much as one blade is crushed, or even bent.

"Then, there ought to have been finger-marks on the door-knob, nice, clean marks, such as you make in fresh paint.

"There weren't any—nothing more than streaks, that might have been made by anybody. And there are no cigar-ashes, either, nor anything else.

"I sit here and defy the most famous mystery unraveller in the English language, or the French, either, to come down here and unravel through three volumes. He won't find any more than I have."

"Behold!" cried Adrea. "The baffled Sherlock! Watson, the needle, if you please!"

After breakfast, while the men smoked on the porch, the subject of the night's disturbance was exhausted. Nothing was missing from the house and the marauder had left absolutely no reminder of his presence. Sifted down, all theories came to nothing, and agreeing that it might have been a tramp seeking food, they gradually dropped the subject.

With Monday morning, Lawrence, still unsatisfied at his failure to make the slightest headway in his efforts to trace the Mystery of the Closing Door, as they now called it, betook himself to town, and life settled down into uninterrupted calm once more. Adrea posed for Payne in the mornings, and sometimes in the afternoons for Lavigne, who returned on Monday from his brief city visit.

She found him much calmer than had been his wont, and, apparently, he was making good progress on his picture, though frequently he seemed to do as much with his palette-knife as with his brush.

It was stupid work, posing for Lavigne. He never had anything to offer in the way of entertaining conversation, and though Adrea disliked the man exceedingly, she almost began to pity him, his life seemed so lonely and forlorn. No one ever came to see him, as at Payne's, where motoring friends often stopped for an hour or

so to bring the gossip from the club or the social set in which they moved.

However, Adrea thought, it was just as well that Lavigne had no droppers-in, for she doubted whether they would be welcome. She was always glad to get out of the studio. There was something about that littered room that stifled her. Always, she thought, she would carry in her brain the false portrait of that girl on whose face she was obliged to gaze each time she took the model-stand. Then, Lavigne had such a searching way of looking at her; and when she returned his gaze he often impatiently reminded her that she must keep looking at the picture on the wall, for the eye-expression was hard to catch.

She thought it strange that he said nothing about the attempted robbery, if robbery it was, but it occurred to her that he had left for New York early the next morning, and so could have known nothing of it. When she did speak of it he seemed interested, but only casually so.

"Did Payne or Lawrence catch sight of the intruder?" he inquired. And when told that they saw no one at all, he remarked that it was, in all probability, a tramp. He had found one, himself, prowling about the bungalow one evening, and after being given food, the man had gone peaceably away.

Payne's impulsive invitation to "come over" in the evenings was not disregarded, and Lavigne began to be a frequent visitor at the other cot-

tage. Sometimes he merely dropped in for a passing call, and at other times he stayed late. Before the end of the week, he had adopted the custom of coming over in time to join Payne in his regular bed-time drink, which, for Morton, was always gin and sugar and water, for Lavigne, hot whiskey-toddy. Payne welcomed these visits, for, as he said, though he never retired without his good-night nip, it was much more pleasant to share it with another human.

Adrea, after the first few nights, learned to time Lavigne's coming, and generally slipped away before he arrived. With her aunt and Payne for audience, Payne more often than not acting as accompanist to her violin, the earlier hours of the evening were spent wandering through the harmonies of her repertoire. Lavigne, more than once, caught the closing bars of the "Wild Rose" as he came up the walk, and, though he had asked them to continue, the girl usually pleaded weariness as an excuse for her refusal.

Adrea wondered much at this new sociability on the part of Lavigne, for he was not of the type that cared for such intimacy as his visits suggested. She noticed, too, that his manner toward Payne, although it had the outward appearance of friendliness, was, in reality, merely the superficial assumption of cordiality.

She sometimes thought she caught a sinister look in his eyes—those queer, unequal eyes that never smiled—as the coming Wostenholm exhibi-

tion was discussed, and having herself readily fathomed the cold selfish nature of the man and his devotion to his personal ambition, she came to distrust this apparent good feeling of Lavigne's for Payne, whom he knew to be his most dangerous rival in the approaching competition.

Toward the end of the week Adrea had a note from Lawrence, saying he would be unable to spend Sunday with them, having business with Mr. Wostenholm, who was on from the West for a brief stay.

"How can you bear the disappointment?" Payne asked, when she took the news to him in the nook of the rose-garden, where he sat at work on the background of her picture.

"Why, what do you mean?" she said, looking at him in surprise.

Payne saw at once that he had made a misstep. "Nothing," he said, lamely. "I'm glad you are bearing it so well."

He realized he was getting in deeper, and plunged.

"You see," he stumbled on, "I've been noticing, or perhaps I've imagined, that there was a pretty strong friendship growing up between you two, and that naturally you looked forward to Allan's Saturday comings with a good deal of pleasure."

"Morton," Adrea said, quietly, "I call that hardly worthy of you. I most certainly have given neither you nor Mr. Lawrence any reason for thinking what you suggest."

"I beg your pardon, Adrea," he said quickly. "I shouldn't have said it, and perhaps I haven't really thought it, only at the fire, you know, when he went after your violin, and afterwards his gift made me fancy that you might be getting fond of each other."

"And Mr. Lawrence, has he ever given you any reason to suppose that he—that I——"

"No, no, none whatever. It's simply my fool imagination. I'm sorry I spoke."

"I'm sorry, too," the girl said, simply. "We —that is my aunt and I—have been so happy here, and we are so grateful for all you have done for us, you and Mr. Lawrence, that I should hate to have anything embarrass our relations. I am sure you are wrong, too, so far as Mr. Lawrence is concerned. He has been considerate and kind, just as you have been. I know that what you imagine has been farthest from his thoughts."

Payne worked on for some time in silence. Adrea, at his request, sat down on the old stone bench, and though he did not need her in the work he was doing, he wanted to get the effect of shadow against the screen of greenery.

"I'm afraid I've delayed this part too long," he said finally. "The roses are nearly gone. I shall have to hurry."

"I always grieve to see the roses go," Adrea said. "Roses seem to me the symbol of youth, and when they droop and fade, and the petals

fall and blow away, it makes me a little sad, for it reminds me that it is the law with everything. Life is so short, and there seems such a great deal to be done."

"Yes," agreed Payne, "a great deal to be done, and so little knowledge for its doing. What a pity we can't live our lives, and then, with all the experience we have gained, suddenly drop back and have our own springtime of youth again—the years when we really live."

"Oh," said the girl, "but youth should be its own compensation, shouldn't it? Wisdom is the fruit of age. What does one want of wisdom if one is young? Besides, who knows that the second springtime of our desire is not in store for us at the end?"

"That may be," he said, smiling. "But come, we shall be quitting work and quoting Omar in another minute. How does Lavigne come on with his picture?"

"Oh, but I mustn't talk about that, you know. He is so secretive. He's very busy, though, and works all the time, even on the days when I don't pose. I suspect he is getting to the point where he won't need me much longer."

"He's a good deal ahead of me, then," said Payne, eyeing his work critically. "Keep still, just a moment. There! It was a certain light on your hair that I haven't been able to catch before. That will do. That's splendid.'

Adrea jumped up and ran around the stone

bench to the easel, to see what he had done. "That *is* better," she commented. "But do you think my hair really has all that gold in it?"

"Yes, all that gold, and something more, a something I never can seem to get. It's fragrance, perhaps. It is very, very beautiful, you know."

"It is very heavy and hot, and a great nuisance to take care of," Adrea retorted, coloring. Then changing the subject quickly, she asked:

"Ought I to tell Mr. Lavigne how you are getting on? He asks me so often nowadays that sometimes it is hard to evade him."

"Why, yes, I don't know any reason why you shouldn't, in a general way. You can say that we are doing as well as can be expected, can't you, and that we are reasonably hopeful of finishing in time for the exhibition? Why is he so anxious?"

"I can't imagine. Really, Morton, I ought not to tell you, but he has tried in every way possible to make me let things slip about your work. I haven't liked it at all, but I've given him very little satisfaction, and I think perhaps he feels rather piqued."

Mrs. Leighton's call to luncheon interrupted them and they went in. In the afternoon, heavy clouds appeared in the west, and soon a thunderstorm was in progress, with a torrential downpour that carried off nearly all of the remaining roses. The sky did not clear after the shower,

but the clouds spread out in a smoky gray blanket, and a rainy, gloomy Sunday ensued that kept everyone indoors and made fires grateful.

Adrea and Payne, however, had their music, and the time passed without dragging. Payne watched the girl's comings and goings about the house with more interest than he was wont to display. He had grown to like hearing her voice as she hummed over the light duties with which she had charged herself. Her assurance that there was nothing between her and Lawrence, too, had its influence, and Payne, though he might not have acknowledged the fact, felt a vague sort of relief in remembering the sincerity of her denial.

Since the fire, and with her sharing his home, he had come to know her better than he had ever known a girl before. Being sisterless, and not much given to feminine society, the smallest acts that Adrea performed were of huge interest.

Her tender care and concern for her aunt, and her kind, thoughtful way of doing small services for her, were indicative of a gentleness and sweetness of character that it was a delight to see, and her patience at times when little things went wrong made him wonder at the quiet strength she displayed. Once, he came upon her with her sewing basket in a corner of the studio, and she hid something, guiltily, at his approach. When he demanded what it was, he discovered in her lap one of his own socks, which she had been darning.

"That," he told her, "is probably the first time I have had a sock mended since I was a boy and lived at home."

"But what do you do?" Adrea asked, making the best of being found out.

"When they have holes I just throw them away, and get new. That is what all men do, isn't it?"

"It is what all extravagant men do, I suppose. If you will let me, I should like nothing better than to go through your chiffonier and put your things in order. May I?"

So she did, Aunt Margaret helping her, both exclaiming over the deplorable conditions they found.

Payne liked it. He came to depend on Adrea for many little things that he had always either done for himself or had let go undone. She went through his collection of ties, throwing away some dozens of soiled ones, and pressing the others until they were crisp and fresh. She even embroidered initials on his handkerchiefs when other needlework failed, and for all these things he was grateful and delighted, not for their intrinsic value, but for the spirit of friendliness she constantly showed in the doing.

If someone had hinted to him that he was growing to be dependent on this slip of a girl, or that she was slowly, but irresistibly creeping into the fastnesses of his heart, never again to emerge, Payne would have been indignant, per-

haps, and certainly not a little shocked. Yet it was a fact that one day, when she went for a visit to Mrs. Leighton's family, he had roamed about the house like a bear with a sore paw, unable to settle himself to work, refusing to be comforted by books, music or tobacco.

CHAPTER XVII

PAYNE MAKES A DISCOVERY

THE week began with what appeared to be a good prospect for quiet, uninterrupted work in the studios of both artists. Payne and Lavigne had agreed to divide their time with Adrea into morning and afternoon sittings. Payne chose the earlier hours of the day, Lavigne the later.

Each morning, when the weather permitted, the nook in the old rose-garden saw the girl seat herself upon the stone bench, and the man, with easel and camp stool, a sheaf of brushes and many tubes of color, place himself before her and begin his labors. Sometimes they talked, sometimes they were silent, but whether they conversed or held their peace, they always seemed the best of company for one another.

On one of these days, Payne, who had left the background to refine his work upon the head, suddenly laid aside his palette. Adrea, who had been sitting in the familiar pose, noticed the action, and turned.

"You're not going to stop so early?" she questioned in surprise.

"Adrea," he said, "do you remember the day

I walked out and found you here the first time, the day I discovered you in this very pose?"

"Why, yes, I remember. Why?"

"Do you recall that you were reading a letter?"

"Yes," said the girl, still wondering.

"Have you that letter?"

"I—think so," she answered, coloring, slightly, under his eyes. "Why do you ask?"

"I'll tell you. You know that since our first sittings I have done very little work on the head. It is still what you might call, 'in the rough.' When I drew you, then, you generally brought the letter to hold, just as when I discovered you. I think there is magic in that letter, for while you held it in your hand you often had the expression that I tried first to catch. I must have you look that way again. Won't you go and get it?"

She sat still for a moment, apparently considering, and he watched until, at last, a little smile came to her lips, and she rose.

"Yes, I will get it, of course, if you really think it has the power of making me look the way you want."

While she was gone Payne sat, thoughtful and preoccupied, staring at the unfinished portrait with eyes that saw it not. He was wondering, as he had often wondered, who had written the lines that were able to put such a light of wistful happiness into this young girl's eyes. That it might have been Lawrence had often occurred

to him; but in view of her denial that she cared for him, he was forced to abandon this thought. As it most certainly could not be Lavigne, Payne gave up his quest, since these two were the only men of their mutual acquaintance.

While he sat puzzling over the problem, Adrea came back. She was waving the sheet, tantalizingly.

"Here is the mighty talisman, the mere holding of which gives one the expression of an angel. Watch! I take it in my hand, so; seat myself, thus; read the very few magic words it contains, and behold! The transformation is complete."

She dropped down on the bench and assumed the seraphic look of a Raphaelite madonna, until Payne, displeased at first by her mockery, burst out laughing.

"There," he cried, "you have spoiled it all. I never can get back my mood after laughing, and I really felt very temperamental this morning. That letter must have lost its power or you would never make a jest of it."

"Poor letter," she said, softly smoothing out its creases on her knee. "Have you lost your magic? If that is true, it is only because a greater magic has superseded you."

As she sat, absorbed for the moment in her own thoughts, Payne, watching her closely, seized his palette and, unnoticed by Adrea, rapidly and surely added the few touches that he needed for his guidance.

When she looked up again he was hard at work, so she returned to her own thoughts, and they sat silent for some time, she, half lost in dreams, he dreaming also, but putting his dream stroke by stroke on the canvas before him; the light in her half-veiled eyes, the warm color of her hair, the round softness of her throat with its shadings of delicate, shadowy, golden-olive that nestled beneath ear and chin.

As he looked up at her from time to time, unconscious in her gracefulness of pose—slim, girlish, delightful in every line, her face, half turned from him, showing a sweet seriousness in her thoughts, he suddenly felt his heart stir within him, and beat with a new, strange power, filling his body to his finger-ends with a full, warm current that made him almost tremble with its thrill.

What could it mean, this ecstasy that was diffusing its glow throughout his being? And then the light came in a broad, glorious flood, and he saw for the first time what had lain in the depths of his heart for days, for weeks, immured by the habit of bachelorhood.

He loved this girl, loved her truly, and to the utmost measure of his manhood. He felt her entwined about his heart, enmeshed, enshrined in the very soul of him, one with all his thoughts; and he knew that never again could he count the boon of existence as worth the having, without her dear presence to guide and light the way.

Slow as Payne's realization had been, now

that he at last saw with wide-open eyes, he was in some doubt how to act. Adrea had certainly never allowed him the slightest inkling that she considered him, or ever should consider him anything more than a friend, a patron, whose kindness she recognized as making pleasant personal contact, resulting from accident in the course of a business arrangement.

She had been friendly, amiable, cheerful and grateful. But, along with this last-named attitude, there had always stood between them the thin curtain of formality, demanded between employer and employed. He had been given the impression that she was consciously modifying her conduct toward him with this in mind.

The relationship between them had started as a business contract, to which there were three parties, Adrea, himself and Lavigne. It had ever been evident that she was minded to fulfil her part, impartially, and without favor.

Indeed, her quiet repudiation of the bare suggestion that an attachment was growing up between her and Lawrence, showed him her feeling upon such matters, and Payne remembered how she had told him of her hope that nothing of this sort would cause an embarrassment to the prejudice of her efforts to serve him.

Then, there was the letter. What was it that she had just said? That its magic was gone—that a greater magic had superseded it? Was there after all someone else.

"Adrea!"

Mrs. Butler's pleasant old voice called from the house.

"Adrea, are you there?"

"Yes, Aunt Margaret," answered the girl, starting up from her seat as if suddenly called back from the far land of day-dreams. Payne started, too, for he saw that an opportunity to act on the half-formed resolution to speak to her was gone. Conscious that his very love had placed a new barrier between them until he should have the courage to tell her, he rose and stood aside for her to pass.

"It must be nearly lunch time," she said. "Mrs. Leighton has gone to the village, and Aunt Margaret and I promised her that we would look after you."

Payne nodded, saying nothing, and to cover his queer half-embarrassment turned quickly to his painting. But he frowned when she had gone. This was the attitude she always seemed to be taking—that of a person striving to repay a debt. He did not like it. In the face of it, it seemed impossible to cross the line. It might be that she assumed it, partly, for her own protection, and in that case an advance on his part might result in defeat, sudden and complete. He felt that he must win something more than her mere gratitude before he could safely go to her with his heart upon his lips.

That afternoon the clouds gathered again and

by evening it was raining hard. Mrs. Butler had retired, and Adrea and Payne were before a cosy fire in the studio, when steps were heard on the veranda, and Lavigne, clad in a dripping oil-skin, walked in upon them.

Adrea wondered anew that he should have come through such a downpour to foregather with a man whom, she was aware, he hated as a rival, and with whom he had so little in common, either intellectually or by temperament. Instead of leaving them, as had been her custom, to-night she determined to stay and learn, if possible, the meaning of these regular visitations.

Lavigne, after the first commonplaces of greetings were exchanged, did not seem talkative. Rather, he appeared to depend upon Payne to furnish both the topic and the argument, while he, sitting back in the long chair he had dragged up before the fire, listened, making an occasional cynical comment, or shortly disputing some view that Payne advanced.

As Adrea watched him, she thought she caught, in his strange eyes, an actual flicker of greenish light, reflected from the blazing logs, just as the deep flame burns in the eyes of a wild beast. He gave her scarcely any attention, but kept his gaze directed full upon Payne, often drawing back his lips in that sinister snarl that answered with him for a smile. She shuddered, but she still watched.

After a time all sorts of wild imaginings began

to creep upon her. The man seemed like a great, venomous snake, lying motionless, waiting, ominously patient, for the safe, sure moment to strike his unresisting prey.

This fancy so absorbed her that once she became conscious that her nerves were stretched as taut as the strings of her own violin. She wondered that Payne did not feel something of it too, but it was quite apparent that he did not, for he rambled on, talking of this and that man's painting or drawing in a way that showed him completely at ease, and more than tolerant of his visitor.

At last, when Adrea was beginning to feel that she could not remain in the same room with Lavigne another five minutes, Payne rose and unlocked the cupboard near the chimney-place, taking from it his own jug, and a bottle of whiskey.

"How will you have it to-night, Lavigne, hot or cold?"

"Ah," said Lavigne, suddenly starting up and rubbing his palms in anticipation, "it seems to me that hot is the proper thing for a night like this."

"Hot it is, then. Adrea, is there a fire in the kitchen?"

Adrea rose, glad to escape, and went to see, returning with a steaming pitcher.

Payne mixed the decoctions for both himself and Lavigne.

"Hello," he said as he tipped the jug for his own drink. "My favorite gin is getting low. Not more than two or three good nips left. I shall have to send for more in the morning."

As he spoke, Adrea, who happened to be looking in Lavigne's direction, thought she saw him start, ever so slightly. His hand certainly trembled a little, enough to spill a few drops of the liquor from his glass.

Then his eyes became fixed upon Payne once more, and she watched them drink together.

As Lavigne stepped past the table to get his oil-skin, he lifted the wicker-covered jug and shook it.

"That's a fact, Mort, you are pretty low. I've plenty at the bungalow. Send you over a bottle, if you like, only it's not your particular brand."

"Oh, no, thanks," Payne replied. "Lawrence is coming to-morrow afternoon, and I'll wire him in the morning to bring a fresh supply. Good-night."

When Lavigne had gone, Payne, returning from the wet veranda, found Adrea sitting and staring abstractedly into the fire.

"Morton," she said, as he drew up a chair. "Do you like that man?"

"Why, no, not particularly. But I don't really dislike him. He's lonely, I expect, and a bit down on his luck, so I make him as wel-

come as I can, on account of that. *You* dislike him very much, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Adrea exclaimed, with a fervor that surprised him. "I loathe and despise—I almost said, fear him, and I believe that is really what I mean."

"Why?"

"I don't know. That's just it. I don't know why. He is cold and treacherous and crawly, like a snake. Did you ever notice how he looks at you? I am sure he hates you, bitterly, though I can't tell why, unless he thinks you are a better artist than he, and stand a better chance for the Wostenholm. I saw him watch you, to-night, out of those sinister eyes as he lay back in that chair, and he reminded me of a great poisonous reptile, ready to strike. Don't trust him, Morton. If you ever stood in his way he would not hesitate to harm you, even though he does accept your hospitality, and pose as your intimate."

Payne laughed, and leaning forward touched her hand that lay on the arm of her chair.

"My dear girl," he said, "you mustn't think such things. Why, you are almost trembling and your hand is as cold as ice. It's sheer nervousness. You mustn't let your nerves rule you like that."

"No, Morton," she answered, shaking her head. "It isn't all nerves."

He tried to laugh at her, but seeing that she

was seriously disturbed, he ceased, and strove to make her see Lavigne as he, in his straightforward, easy-going fashion, had always seen him, a moody fellow, somewhat soured by ill luck and failure, but really at heart a good sort if one only made allowances.

But she shook her head and could not see the matter in his way. It seemed to be her settled conviction that harm of some kind would result from Lavigne's constant visits, either to Payne himself or to the unfinished portrait.

"I have seen him look at your easel," she told him, "as if he would delight in tearing the canvas into strips and stamping them under his feet. You must be blind not to see the jealousy and hatred in his eyes."

In vain he endeavored to reason with her, for she was past reasoning.

"Please," she pleaded, "don't try to argue with me. It isn't anything that I can prove. It is what I *know*."

She spoke with a little catch in her voice, and rose. Payne perceived that she was sadly overwrought, and that each moment was adding to her very real distress. He longed to take her in his arms, and soothe and comfort and reassure her, and for one wild moment he even thought of making his avowal then and there. But he caught himself, for it was evident that any further stress might bring with it a breakdown and a flood of tears.

Indeed, when she laid for an instant her slim, soft hand in his her eyes were strangely bright.

"Don't think me foolish and childish," she said as they parted at the stairway, "but I ask you, please, to be warned against that man. Be watchful and on guard, for—for my sake, if not for your own."

"Adrea—Adrea!"

But she had flown up the stairs as swiftly as a winged thing, and he stood with his hands outstretched and her name still on his lips, until the fluttering of her gown grew faint in the upper hall, and he heard her door close, softly, behind her.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PORTRAIT LAVIGNE PAINTED

THE next morning Payne did not appear at the usual breakfast hour, and Adrea, thinking it strange, for he was usually waiting when she arrived down stairs, asked Mrs. Leighton if he had gone out for an early walk.

Mrs. Leighton had seen nothing of him, and vaguely uneasy, Adrea thought of going to his door. But she decided to wait, for he might wish to sleep, and she reflected that she really had no cause for disturbing him.

Mrs. Butler had passed a restless night, and was remaining in bed for a morning nap, so Adrea ate her own breakfast alone and then arranged a tray for her aunt. As she passed Payne's door, she heard him moving about, and after going to Mrs. Butler's room she returned to the hall and listened. She could hear nothing, and finally, troubled at his non-appearance, she knocked.

"Yes, who's there?" came Payne's voice.

"It's Adrea. I have been wondering whether you were ill, or just lazy."

"It's nothing," he said, "nothing but a bad

headache. I have them at times, and I thought I would see if I couldn't sleep it off."

"Can't I bring you something? A cup of tea?"

"No, thanks, nothing now. I shall get up soon, and then I will take something."

"I'm sorry," she said, softly, "I wish I could help. You mustn't try to work this morning, and perhaps by afternoon you will feel right again. Perhaps Mr. Lavigne will exchange hours for to-day. Shall I ask him?"

"Certainly. That's a good idea—that is, if you think you can stand him so soon after breakfast."

Adrea made a little grimace. "I shall try," she answered. "Try to sleep, won't you?"

She moved away and busied herself about the house for an hour, for they breakfasted early in the Payne household. Then, at last, when she could not put it off any longer, she walked slowly in the direction of Lavigne's.

As she neared the bungalow, she found herself stopping frequently to pick the wild flowers that grew along the path in a half-conscious attempt to delay the hour when she must again enter his presence.

She made excuses for little detours on either side of the way, much as a child loiters and gazes in at the shop windows on the way to the dentist's. But every step brought her nearer, and conquering her distaste she laid her flowers

in the cool shade of some shrubbery, and passed in at the gate.

She found Lavigne just smoking his after-breakfast cigarette on the little veranda off the studio. He started visibly at the sound of her "Good-morning," and rose, looking at her inquiringly.

"Mr. Payne had a headache this morning," she said, "and he thought, or rather I suggested, that perhaps you would exchange hours for to-day."

He did not answer at once, but stood studying her intently.

"Payne—has a headache, you say?" he asked, with a nervous clearing of his throat and a moistening of his lips.

Then, seeing that she was watching him, he recovered himself.

"Why yes, of course," he said at last. "You may sit now, if you like. I will be ready by the time you have changed."

Adrea disappeared without more words, and as she closed the door leading to the robing room, Lavigne made a sudden, half-involuntary motion as if to call her back. But she was gone before he had time to speak, and with a shrug he entered the studio, carefully closing the glazed doors after him.

He stepped to his easel, and pulling aside the cloth that covered the canvas, stood looking at it. Again, into his eyes came the sinister look

that Adrea had seen, but now it had a new quality —that of triumph. The strange, snarling smile again distorted his lips, and he emitted a soundless, mirthless chuckle beneath his breath, as he turned the easel half round, so that it faced the door through which Adrea would presently come.

Leaving the curtain before the picture drawn wide, he quickly left the room.

As Adrea robed herself in the hated gown of spangles, it seemed to her that she had gone through the process countless thousands of times. Always she had loathed the dress, and her appearance in it, she felt, was almost meretricious. She had often wondered who had worn it before her—where Lavigne had procured the thing, and though, by familiarity, the uncomfortableness from this thought had largely passed, she never put it on without a qualm.

The gown fortunately fastened up the side with hooks that she could reach, and now, when the last one was in place, she gave the skirt a final tug before the small, dim mirror and entered the studio.

In two steps she was face to face with the uncovered picture on the easel, the figure of herself, standing out bold and clear from the darkness of its background.

At first she glanced at it in surprise, sweeping the studio, and noting Lavigne's absence. Then her eyes fell upon the canvas again, and she stopped short as if transfixed.

Her hand touched a stool, and half staggering she sank down upon it. Bending slightly forward, by chance she fell almost into the very pose of the picture and sat there looking with startled comprehension and growing horror on the image, which flaunted back its gaze upon her as from a mirror.

It was herself that confronted her—her own body, clothed in the gown of spangles, slim, straight and beautiful, each long line, each delicately rounded curve masterfully drawn. It was youth, exuberant, careless youth, that found its expression there. The softly yielding sway of the figure was seemingly caught in the very act of motion. It was as if the breast must rise and fall with the life that almost touched it.

But the face! Ah, the face! That was what brought to Adrea Varrick's eyes the look of abhorrence and utter loathing. Was that—could these be her features? Did she look like that? She started forward from where she sat, her whole body tense and trembling. A hand-mirror lay on a tabouret. She seized it.

No, thank God, that was not her face. She did not look like that woman!

Then, point by point, line by line she analyzed the painted features, comparing and studying her own reflection. Line by line they were one and the same. The mouth, the chin, the nose, the eyes, the hair, all were faithfully, marvelously reproduced, but the ensemble no more matched

her own face than she resembled a painted woman of the streets.

For this canvas-woman was an anomaly. With the figure and the features of a girl, pure as the morning, lithe, graceful, full of vigor and vitality, it bore upon its face the mark and stamp of Knowledge—all the sins of the world, all the wickedness, all the misery, all the passions that have conquered men since Eden. It was the very essence of sophistication.

And this was what Lavigne had been doing. Foiled, beaten, and discouraged in his attempt, his honest first attempt, to paint the girl as she was, stung by his losses in the stock-market, despairing of ever winning the grand prize in a field that had been hitherto untrodden by him, the field of truth, he had turned his back upon what he had set out to do, and, fired by hope of reward, had pursued his accustomed, twisted, and familiar path of falsity to such heights as even he had never scaled before.

With his mastery of technic, his magic deftness of touch, his marvelous gift of imagination, gnarled and spurious as it was from long prostitution, he had here, at last, produced such subtleties of pose and expression as never had existed outside the mind of a Da Vinci, or a Guido.

By a devilish cunning and ingenuity, trickwork of the most consummate skill, he had painted a face, which, to the eye of the casual observer, might have appeared unremarkable as

that of a young girl—a debutante, perhaps, dressed for her first ball. But a second glance could not fail to cause the beholder to halt, and begin a study of the picture, that would reveal, slowly at first, then with the suddenness of the drawing of a curtain, the real character of the portrait, veiled for only that fleeting first moment in illusionary purity, until finally it stood out, bold, clear and unmistakable in all the hideousness of its conception.

And in this master-work Julius Lavigne had used Adrea Varrick as his model.

There sat her infamous counterpart in the spangled gown, her virginal innocence stained and besmirched, her maiden-modesty degraded, with the depravity of the ages looking out from eon-old eyes, soliciting the beholder, pandering to his passions, holding out to him the beckoning hand of seduction. It was the bestial caricature of a young girl's soul.

As Adrea sat there, her eyes held to those of the portrait in horrid fascination, wave after wave of revulsion, sickening almost to nausea, passed over her. The very air seemed vitiated, stifling, difficult to breathe. The blood beat in her ears and her head swam with the tumult of her thoughts.

Slowly, one idea stood out from among the jumble of the rest, and took definite form in her mind. This canvas must be destroyed. It must be hacked to shreds, rubbed out, obliterated before the world could gaze upon it.

Roused by the thought, she dragged her eyes from the painted face and sought for some implement of destruction.

Her eyes fell upon Lavigne's palette-knife lying before her on a low stand. She seized it and stepped forward, toward the easel.

So suddenly intent was she on her purpose that she did not hear the cat-like footfalls on the rug behind her. He was just in time, for the knife was already descending when he caught her arm, and sent the thin blade rattling to the floor.

Whirled around by the force of his grasp, Adrea found herself looking full into the face of Lavigne.

"So, young woman! There are cat's claws, after all, in those soft fingers! What would you do? Destroy this picture?"

For the first time Adrea found herself not afraid of this man. She looked him straight in the eyes, those strange, unequal eyes that glowed hot, now, with evil, greenish fire, and she even took a step toward him, her head high and her small hands clenched.

"Yes, I would destroy it," she answered him, returning his gaze with steady eyes. "It is no more fit to exist than the man who made it."

Lavigne's snarling smile split his face in a mask-like grin. He was perfectly self-possessed, and the tones of his voice were silky-smooth.

"I infer, then, that you do not care for the

likeness. But even if you do not, I would remind you that it is not customary for models to go to such extremities to express their displeasure."

"And do you think," she asked, her voice husky and trembling, "that any woman with an atom of decency or self-respect could see herself outraged and insulted by such a *thing* as this and not seek to defend herself?"

"Insulted? Outraged?" repeated Lavigne. "Those are hard words, Miss Varrick. You will please remember that I was not commissioned to paint your portrait. I hired you as a model. I have paid you regularly. You sat for me when I wanted you. The contract has been perfectly fulfilled. You have no cause for complaint, and I had a perfect right to paint you as I saw fit."

"And this is what you saw—in me?"

Adrea flung out a gesture of loathing toward the picture.

"Can any artist tell exactly what he sees?" returned Lavigne, shrugging. "No, it is not what he sees with his eyes, but what he sees with his brain, that counts. The great portrait painter is he who goes beneath the surface and brings to light the real character of his subject. They are often angry, the people I paint. They see things in my pictures that the mirror, perhaps, does not show them."

"Oh!" gasped Adrea, "how can you say such things to me? Look at that face, the degradation,

the beastliness of it, and you say it is my face! Oh, you beast! Don't touch me! Let me go!"

And as Lavigne tried to seize and stay her, she slipped between his hands, and fled from the house, her breath coming in deep sobs as she ran, the spangled gown trailing in the dust.

Adrea's one obsessing idea was to get away. As she flung herself across the lawn, she heard Lavigne's quick steps cross the flagging of the court and caught a throaty, evil chuckle that escaped his drawn-back lips.

While she had faced him she had been brave enough, but the moment she turned her back fear had replaced courage, and with retreat, panic had replaced fear. She half turned on hearing his foot-steps, and looked with wild eyes over her shoulder. Then she ran harder than ever, past the boundary of the lawn, stumbling through the long grass of the field. Again she turned, and seeing this time that she was not pursued, slackened her pace, and, panting for breath, kept on at the best speed she could maintain.

To reach home, to inform Payne, to take counsel with him as to what should be done to keep this monstrous picture out of the Wostenholm, was her frenzied desire. Something must be done; something should be done. And she knew that she could depend upon Morton Payne to do whatever might be needed.

She plunged on through the uncut field, the

spangled gown hindering her limbs and catching on twigs and bushes, careless that her hair was slipping from its fastenings, unmindful of the wild-rose thorns that tore at her ankles until they were flecked with red.

She tripped on the steps that crossed the low stone wall at the edge of Payne's lawn, and nearly fell, but she stumbled to her feet and kept on with wearied, shaking limbs that barely carried her to the porch.

Then, utterly spent, she sank down on the steps, too weak to move farther, or to call. Gradually, as breath again filled her overstrained lungs, she grew calmer, and with an effort rose and tried to gather up her fallen hair. Failing, she walked unsteadily across the porch and into the studio.

"Morton!" she cried. "Morton!"

Slowly, a figure that was seated in a deep wicker chair by the north window rose and turned uncertainly toward her.

As the light fell across his face, Adrea stopped suddenly, shocked at his appearance. He did not come to meet her, but stood holding by one hand to the back of his chair. She could see that his features were gaunt and drawn, as if with pain, and that his eyes had a dull stare. It was as if the man had grown years older in the night.

"What is it, Adrea?"

His voice startled her with its low, deep tone.

"Oh—Morton!" she gasped.

She tried to speak, to tell him, but the words choked in her throat, and with a sob she sank down on the rug before him, and buried her face in her hands.

He stood a moment, peering down at her, then stooped and raised her gently, and placed her in a chair.

"Don't, Adrea, don't," he said, slowly. "You mustn't distress yourself like this. Perhaps it is not so bad. Tell me how you found it out? Did you see it for yourself, just now?"

In an instant she was on her feet and facing him.

"Then you knew! You knew, and did not tell me! Oh, it is infamous, unbelievable in you —you, who could have stopped it if you had cared to—somehow, before it was finished."

"Adrea!"

"Miss Varrick, if you please, Mr. Payne."

She was cold as steel now, and each word came sharp and hard-bitten between her teeth, each separate syllable dipped in the gall of her unutterable scorn.

"What sort of a man do you call yourself, to allow a girl to be insulted, outraged, held up before the whole world as I shall be, in the hideous form of a vampire, such as he has made of me. You, who pretended to be a friend, you who laughed at my distrust of that—that beast. All the time you have been laughing at me in

your sleeve, chuckling with him over your infamous bargain!"

A look of surprise, then utter amazement had spread over Payne's haggard face as she spoke.

"Adrea," he said, low and stern, "what are you talking about? Are you mad, or am I?"

The girl laughed, shortly.

"Mad?" she said. "No, we're neither of us mad. Why did you deny yourself the pleasure of being there this morning? Or did your friend Lavigne insist on taking all the pleasure of his own work?"

"Adrea, will you stop accusing me long enough to tell me what has happened?"

The erect attitude of the man, the sudden, strong tone of his voice, the firm setting of his lips, caused Adrea to pause and look at him.

He stood facing her, straight and tall. The droop in his shoulders was gone, the lines in his face were deep and grim, but there was nothing of shame to be read there, and nothing of guilt.

For the first time, she noticed that he was not looking at her, but past and beyond her, as if she were not really there.

She stared at him.

"Do you mean that you do not know the portrait—the picture Julius Lavigne has painted of me?"

"No, I do not know it. I have never seen it, nor heard what it is like."

"Then why, when I came here to you, did

you say 'perhaps it may not be so bad'? Why did you ask me how I found it out?"

Payne started, hesitated for an instant, and then partly turned away from her.

"You saw that I was in distress. ' Look at me—my gown, my hair! Why do you stand there and stare like that, and ask me to tell you what has happened? Can you not *see*?"

Payne turned his eyes full upon her.

"No, Adrea, God help me," he said, "I cannot see."

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN THE LIGHT WENT OUT

FOR an instant Adrea did not fully grasp the import of Payne's words. She stood staring dumbly at him, his meaning slowly taking shape in her mind, and replacing indignation and fierce resentment. It was as if a hand were clutching at her naked heart.

She looked at his eyes. There was a peculiar emptiness in them that she had never seen before. A sudden impulse made her step, quickly and silently a pace to one side. He did not hear her move, and his eyes continued to look blankly at the spot where she had stood.

Then she realized, with a shock that was almost like a physical blow to her consciousness. Morton Payne was a blind man!

Sorrow, pity and self-reproach all struggled for supremacy in the bewilderment of her mind. She raised her hands and swept back the falling lengths of her hair, and then in an instant she was at his side.

"Morton, Morton, what has happened to you? Your eyes! You cannot see! Speak to me! Tell me what it is!"

"I cannot see you, Adrea. The—the light went

out this morning—while you were gone. I am—blind."

"But why? What have you done? What is the reason for this dreadful thing? Can we do nothing? Have you sent for a doctor?"

"Yes," he answered, wearily. "Mrs. Leighton has gone to the village to wire a message to Allan. He will bring somebody. For the rest, I do not know. There was nothing the matter last night. I saw perfectly well. I awoke at the usual time this morning, and the light in the room seemed very dim. I thought it was barely daylight and went to sleep again.

"Later I awoke, and got up. It still seemed very dark, but I could see the windows, and some of the objects in the room. That was when you came. It was just dawning upon me that there must be something very wrong. I didn't like to frighten you, for I thought it might be a temporary disturbance that would presently pass.

"I fancied I had read of indigestion sometimes playing tricks like that. So I went back to bed and waited until you had gone. Then I dressed, and groped downstairs and ate a little breakfast, just to satisfy Mrs. Leighton. Then, afterward, I came and sat down, here, and tried to see your picture. I could not, and even as I tried, things got dimmer, and soon it became—quite dark."

Adrea felt the tears rush to her eyes and over-

flow, dropping silently, a gentle outpouring of grief and pity. Payne, as he finished, fumbled for his chair, and slowly sat down, staring dry-eyed at nothing.

Adrea dropped on her knees at his side and took one of his strong hands in both her own.

"Morton, can you forgive me for what I said to you? I—I did not know—I did not dream. And I was scarcely myself. I was so full of my own selfish trouble that I noticed nothing— Oh, it was brutal in me!"

With a little sob she half-collapsed, her face buried in her hands. Her forehead touched his knee and she rested against it, her slim shoulders shaking.

Payne raised his hand and laid it gently on her hair.

"Forgive, Adrea? There's nothing to forgive. I was startled and non-plussed—I could make nothing of what you were saying. Will you tell me, now, what it was?"

His hand slipped down about her shoulders.

"Why, your hair is streaming all about you. What is it, Adrea? Something has gone wrong. That's what you were talking about when you came in. Has Lavigne—? Tell me, Adrea," Payne cried, leaning forward. "You have come here dressed in some model's gown of Lavigne's. Your hair is loose; you were half out of breath when you came in. What is it? Tell me quickly."

"Oh, Morton," Adrea cried, raising herself, "I have no right to intrude my troubles on such an affliction as yours."

"Affliction or not," he said, "if Lavigne has done anything to offend you, I must know it at once. Please explain."

Adrea tried to tell him, as calmly as she could, of the happenings at Lavigne's—how she had come out of the little room and found herself face to face with the portrait for which she had posed; the first slow shock, as the infamy of its conception had stood revealed; the insulting triumph of Lavigne's words, and finally, her flight across the fields.

Before she had finished Payne was on his feet, his fists clenched, his jaw set, his face a study of righteous and impotent rage.

"That's enough, Adrea. Don't rowel yourself by telling me any more. Take me over there. Put me face to face with this scoundrel, and, blind as I am, I promise he shall pay."

"No, no, Morton, please, you mustn't think of doing such a thing. We must wait, wait until Allan comes, and the doctor. All I want is to have this awful canvas kept from the exhibition. If we can only prevent its being shown, I am willing to waive punishment, so long as I never see Julius Lavigne again."

"The sneaking, treacherous hound!" Payne muttered between his teeth. "Allan was right. He always distrusted him. He has painted other

girls like that, but never so boldly. What a fool I was to have believed in him. He told me he was trying to redeem himself and his unsavory reputation by this very picture. He has told me so all along. That was the reason he was so anxious to have you for his model. And like a fool, I believed him.

"Now, he has done the worst he knew, and I am helpless, tied hand and foot, a prisoner in the dark. God—!"

Payne raised his arms, quivering, and let them drop with a despairing gesture of helplessness. Adrea strove to calm him, to prevent him from taking up the burden of this self-assumed responsibility for her trouble. She tried to make him feel that her trust in him was, as ever, loyal and unshaken.

She made him sit down again, and as she arranged a cushion behind his head she laid her two hands gently across his eyes.

"Is there any pain, Morton? Has there been nothing, no strange symptom, no warning of this?"

He reached up and took her hands, and drew her down again, by his knee.

"It has come so suddenly," she said, "that perhaps it will go as quickly. It may be that some nerve has been paralyzed for the time being, and will recover."

Payne shook his head. "I'm afraid not, but we shall see. Adrea, I want you and Aunt Mar-

garet to stay on, even if we can't finish our portrait. Until I am certain whether I am to be blind I shall remain here, and it would be very, very lonely without you. Will you stay?"

Adrea looked at him, almost shyly.

"Yes, Morton," she answered, "I will stay as long as you need me."

He breathed a sigh of relief, as if something of moment had been decided, and reached out his hand toward her. It touched her shoulder, left bare by the low, evening gown of spangles, and shrouded only in the fine-spun veil of her hair. His fingers felt its silken threads, and he lifted a tress and drew it through his hands, wonderingly.

"How long it is," he said, "and how soft, and how I loved to paint it, its gloss and its shadows."

The sound of a horse and carriage on the gravel of the driveway made her look up.

"It's Mrs. Leighton coming back," she said. "Would you mind if I left you to change my gown? She would think it queer if she saw me in this."

"Certainly, only say nothing to her of my eyes. She doesn't know. I merely told her to wire Allan to bring Dr. Thomas with him. Wait, I'll go to my room, I think, if you will show me the way."

With her hand on his arm, she guided him up the stairs and left him at his door.

"If you need me you will speak? I shall be here in my room for a time."

He promised, and she left him, looking back wistfully as the tall figure disappeared. And entering her own chamber she crept miserably upon her bed, and broke down utterly, tears of sorrow and pity flowing unchecked for the man upon whom this supreme misfortune had so cruelly and so mysteriously fallen.

Adrea lay there a long time, her thoughts constantly upon Payne, forgetful of herself and the specter of Lavigne's picture. And over and over again she prayed he might be saved from the shadow that had fallen upon him with such appalling suddenness.

She saw him again as he sat in the studio, waiting for her to come—the bright, cheerful studio, full of color and the scent of flowers. And the thought came that to him it was no longer cheerful, that he had waited there in the deepest blackness of night, and that so he might always wait.

It was then that the tears flowed afresh, and she was aware that there was a new meaning in them, not alone pity and grief and womanly sympathy, but something more, something deeper and stronger and more lasting, something that wove and wound its way to the inmost recesses of her soul and remained there, close about her heart, bringing with it a strange glow that she did not quite understand. She felt as if some

new fountain of emotion was bursting forth, flooding her whole being with a warm, suffusing tide, that filtered and spread until at last it was a part of herself, never again to be dammed up.

After a time she rose, and bathed her eyes until they shone clear once more. She cast off the hated spangled gown and buried it deep in a corner of her closet. She straightened the tangles of her hair, gathered it in its great, soft knot again, and slipped quickly into a simple frock of white.

As she finished fastening it, she heard the sound of wheels, and running to the casement window, she saw two men approaching in a light wagon. One was Allan Lawrence; the other, she knew, must be the doctor.

Without telling Payne of their arrival, Adrea ran downstairs and reached the porch as Lawrence was tying the horse. He saw her and waved a hand in greeting.

"Miss Varrick, this is Dr. Thomas," he said, as they reached the steps where she stood waiting.

Dr. Thomas was a man of middle age, quick in his movements, and gave the impression that he had barely time to live, and to accomplish the things he had been put upon earth to do.

He gave Adrea his hand for an instant, then turned to Lawrence.

"This young lady is not the one I was to see?"

"Adrea," asked Lawrence, looking with apprehension into the girl's serious face and weary

eyes, "what is the matter? Why is Dr. Thomas needed?"

He saw that she was very white and that she was fighting to keep her lips steady enough to form the words she must speak.

"Here, Adrea, sit down and try to tell us calmly. Is it your aunt? Not Morton!"

"Yes, Allan, Morton," answered the girl, her voice very low, "it is his eyes. When he woke this morning there was something the matter, and he said he had a headache, and stayed in his room. I went to Mr. Lavigne's and came back rather sooner than usual. I found him in the studio and—and—Allan, he could not see. He could not even see me, when I stood before him."

"Blind! Morton Payne blind?" Lawrence gasped. "Good God, Adrea, how did it happen?"

"He doesn't know. There was no pain, nothing. The light just—went out."

"Doctor," said Lawrence, turning to the specialist, "what do you make of this? You know Morton Payne, I think. He was never ill a day in his life. How could he become blind in an hour, without warning of any kind?"

"It is not a common occurrence," said Dr. Thomas, "but it does occur, from various causes. May I see Mr. Payne, Miss ——"

"He is in his room. Will you come, Allan?"

Lawrence and Adrea went up the stairs together. On the landing Lawrence stopped.

"How does he bear it, Adrea?" he asked, laying his hand on the girl's arm.

"He is very calm and very brave," she said; "did you need to ask that, Allan?"

"No, there was no need. Let us go to him." Adrea knocked on Payne's door and was answered by a calm-toned "Yes" from within.

"Here is Allan, Morton."

"Good! Tell him to come up, Adrea. Did he bring Thomas?" The voice was strong, and under perfect control.

Lawrence opened the door and went in.

Payne was sitting in a deep chair by the open window, his hands idly folded in his lap, his head bent, his eyes closed. He heard the step on the threshold and turned.

"Is that you Allan?" he said.

"Yes, Mort. God, that you should have to ask!"

Payne rose and held out his hand, and Lawrence gripped it silently.

There was not a quiver in the calm face, and the hand-clasp was warm and steady and strong.

"Brave old man!" came from Allan's compressed lips, in an admiration that his anguish could not hide.

"Did you bring Thomas, Allan?"

"Yes, Mort, he's below. Shall he come up here?"

"No, we'll go down. Where's Adrea? I want her too."

Payne threw an arm over Lawrence's shoulder. "Come," he said, "let's hear what he has to tell us."

And together they went slowly down the stairs and into the big bright studio.

And there they awaited the verdict.

At the end of ten minutes Dr. Thomas laid down his lens and took off his head-mirror. All his questions had been answered. Everything visible had come under his eye.

"Of course," he said, "I cannot look into the deep structure of the eyes without an ophthalmoscope, but from what I can discover the trouble lies with the optic nerve. There is some change there. The cause is not apparent."

Adrea listened to the doctor's words with a dull ache in her temples. It was Payne, himself, who first spoke.

"And the chances, Doctor, are there any?"

"There may be, Mr. Payne, but I do not say there are. I am sorry to tell you that the chances are against there being any hope at all. However, I would not pronounce a final verdict without a more thorough examination than is possible here.

"I would recommend quiet and rest for a few days and then a visit to my office. I may say, frankly, that I am at a loss to account for the suddenness of the trouble. You admit no history of any disorder that could possibly explain it. We must, if possible, determine the exact

cause. Until then, we can only wait and hope. I should advise you to stay here and keep your close friends about you all you can. Rest, sleep, take short walks, eat simple food and in a week come to me in town."

As the doctor drove away Mrs. Butler, returning from her favorite seat under the old willow by the boat-house, stopped at the doorway of the studio, and bade them a good-morning. Her kind old face was cheery with smiles, and her arms were full of wild flowers.

Adrea rose and met her, and taking her arm led the way to the long veranda, and there she gently told her of the great calamity. The motherly sympathy of the elder woman was quick to respond, and she insisted on going at once to Payne.

And he, touched deeply by the sincerity of her sorrow, repeated the request that he had made of Adrea, that they both should stay and help him accustom himself to his new condition, and to the life he feared he must eventually face.

Then, when the two women had left the studio, Payne called Lawrence to him, and as calmly as he could repeated what Adrea had told him of her experience at Lavigne's.

Before he had half finished, Lawrence had guessed the entire wretched story, and was on his feet, striding angrily up and down before the fireplace.

"I feared it. The miserable snake! I feared

just this thing. I ought to have known," he accused himself, fulminating in bitterness against Lavigne.

Suddenly he ceased his tigerish pacing and his face set grimly. He caught up his hat from a chair.

"I—I'm going out, Mort," he said, striving to make his tone casual. "If you want anything, Adrea is within call."

Payne heard him go by the long, glazed doors that led to the veranda. His quick footsteps sounded for an instant as he crossed the porch, and then there was silence.

Payne sat still in his chair, his thoughts going back to the girl and her distress. He thought, too, of the night before, when they had parted at the landing on the stairs. It seemed ages ago. He remembered how he had almost told her that he loved her; another second, and it would have been done.

Now, perhaps, he could never tell her. A blind man could not ask a young girl to marry him—to take a life position as his nurse, to pilot him about from one place to another, arousing the pity of all beholders, dragging herself through life chained to a weight, an incumbrance, such as he would be.

He had scarcely thought of these things, events had come so fast, but now he began to realize, and he lay back with a groan of despair, for in his heart he knew that the loss of his sight

could be nothing compared to the loss, forever, of the woman he loved.

And he did love her. He knew it now, as never before. Her gentleness, her sympathy, her sweetness made a stronger appeal. And her sorrow at his affliction, the real sincerity of her grief made this greatest of his misfortunes all the harder to bear.

He heard a soft step in the room and lifted his head.

"Where is Allan, Morton?" came the voice he loved to hear.

"He has gone out somewhere, I believe."

"Which way did he go?" asked the girl, for Payne had moved nervously as he answered, and his hand twitched upon his chair-arm.

"Which way did he go?" she repeated quickly. "Morton, answer me. Have you been telling him about the picture at Lavigne's?"

"Yes, Adrea, I told him, for he is the only one, now, who can help. He has gone there, I think."

He heard the girl quickly cross the room and step out where she could see the wide space that separated the house from the bungalow, and across which she had struggled in such terror that morning.

Lawrence was returning. He was walking very fast. In a moment he was over the stone wall, and seeing her, he ran across the lawn.

"What is it, Allan?" she cried, as she noted

the close-set lips and the sternly drawn brows. "What have you done?"

"Nothing," he said. "He's gone. And he has taken the canvas with him."

CHAPTER XX

LAWRENCE TAKES UP THE TRAIL

"GONE!" cried Adrea. "Gone, and taken the picture with him! Then we can do nothing."

The distress in her tone had a despairing note of finality in it, and Lawrence hastened to reassure her.

"Steady, Adrea," he said, laying a hand on her arm. "He ought to be easy to find. A man carrying a canvas of that size, unboxed, can't go anywhere without being noticed. I will send a wire to New York and have someone on the watch."

A crash from inside the studio startled them, and running to the door, they saw Payne, his hands fending the way before him, endeavoring to make his way to the veranda door. He had struck a small table bearing a Chinese vase, which had fallen, and was shattered into fragments. Lawrence stopped. A great wave of pity swept over him as, for the first time, the actual helplessness of his friend was brought home to him. Adrea sprang to Payne's side, and guided him to the porch.

"What was that I heard, Allan?" Payne de-

manded, "Lavigne gone? Is his house deserted and closed?"

"No," Lawrence replied, trying to cover the emotion that forced itself into his voice. "I saw his servant. She said Lavigne left about two hours ago. He packed up a few things, hurriedly, and she heard him telephone the carriage man at the village to come for him by the old road. That's why no one here saw him go. He left instructions with the woman to send his things in care of the janitor of his apartment in town, and gave her what money was due her, saying that she was to close the house as soon as possible. He left no address."

"Two hours ago," Payne muttered. "That was about eleven o'clock. He would have had time to catch the train at eleven-thirty, if he hurried, but that back road is a bad one."

Lawrence was already on the way to the telephone, and Payne and Adrea heard him call up the village hackman, and inquire if Mr. Lavigne had made his train.

"He did? Thank you,good-bye," they heard him say, and Adrea felt a little sinking of her heart, for she knew that this had been their only chance.

Lawrence, however, did not give up. He telephoned directly to a private detective agency in New York, that he had several times employed in legal cases, giving them instructions to watch every Long Island train, and if Lavigne, or any one with a picture canvas got off, to shadow him.

"We shall hear of him," Lawrence said, confidently, as he joined them. "Saunders has put a good man on watch and he can't get by."

"What will you do if they find him?" asked Adrea.

"If I lay hands on the beast I think I can guarantee that his picture will never appear at the Wostenholm," Lawrence asserted. "Don't worry about that. I wasn't an assistant district attorney three years for nothing."

Mrs. Leighton announced luncheon, and they all went in. It was Payne's first meal since the darkness had come, but Mrs. Butler, with a woman's forethought, had prepared his food, so that he was saved an awkward attempt at using his knife and fork.

Lawrence tried to feign cheeriness, but now and then, his eye catching Payne's slow endeavors to gather the food on his plate, his own almost choked him. Adrea, too, attempted to carry on a neutral conversation, but with her feeling for Payne aroused to the utmost sensitiveness, she abandoned subject after subject, lest she might recall to him too sharply his great misfortune.

They were all glad when it was over, and they could move back to the veranda, where the blind man could sit and talk on a more nearly equal footing. They made him comfortable in a long chair; Adrea brought her sewing and Lawrence read aloud from the novel of the month.

After a few chapters, he gradually modulated his voice to a monotone, glancing at Payne from time to time, as if awaiting its effect as a soporific. He was not wrong in his calculations, for at the end of a half hour Payne slept, worn out by the tremendous strain of the mental shock he had suffered.

Lawrence lowered his voice to an indistinct murmur and then, finally, ceased reading altogether. Rising softly, with a glance at Adrea, and a finger on his lips, he made signs for her to remain with Payne, and then tiptoed off the porch.

At the end of half an hour Adrea felt, rather than heard him at the studio doors, which opened behind her. Turning, she saw him standing there, beckoning. She rose, quietly, and joined him.

He led the way back into the great room, where their voices could not disturb the sleeper.

As she glanced at his face she was almost startled at the grim set of his jaw, the glint in his eyes, and the heightened color of his cheeks. In his hand he held Payne's magnifying glass, which he twirled between his fingers.

Adrea stood for a moment, looking at him. She was about to speak, when he said suddenly:

"I must go to town, Adrea, by the earliest train. There's one in forty minutes I believe. Will you telephone to the village and tell them to send a carriage to meet me. I will walk from here."

"What is it, Allan? What have you discovered? Anything that I should know?"

He looked at her a moment, hesitating.

"Not yet, Adrea. There's something I suspect, but I'm not sure. If I can catch that train I may find it out to-night; then I shall motor back here to-morrow. I'm going to slip away quietly. You can tell Mort that I heard from the men I set to watch for Lavigne—that they sent for me, but that I think they are following the wrong man."

She had turned to run to the telephone when he apparently thought of something, and stopped her.

"See if you can find me a small bottle, will you, Adrea? Then call the village."

She left the room to search the kitchen for the desired vial, and when she returned she found him intently examining with his magnifying glass, a lower corner of Payne's unfinished portrait.

She heard him give an exclamation of satisfaction, and saw him rise, covering the canvas again, carefully, and turning the easel toward the wall, as he had found it.

"Will this do?" she asked, holding out a small flask.

"Just the thing. Thank you, Adrea. Now go back to Mort. Keep his mind off himself if you can."

"That is hard, Allan," she said, wistfully glancing at the veranda where Payne lay in the

great chair, for a time in the land of forgetfulness.

"He is very, very brave, but to be blind—oh, I think it must be the greatest desolation in the world. Think of it, Allan, to hear, and feel, and to remember, but never to see again all the beautiful things that have made up one's life! And it seems doubly hard for him, an artist, for he has lost so much more of life than ordinary persons could lose."

She came close, glistening drops dimming the clearness of her eyes, and put a hand beseechingly on his coat-sleeve.

"Tell me, Allan, do you think there is any hope for him at all?"

Lawrence, looking down at her, suddenly felt a new sense of understanding between himself and this gentle girl. His own eyes grew moist, and he laid his arm quietly about her shoulders, as a brother might have done.

"I don't know, little girl. I am afraid—greatly afraid."

She leaned wearily against him for an instant, her head just touching his shoulder, resting the moment in the comfort of his arm.

"We love him very much, don't we, Adrea?" he whispered.

"Yes, Allan," she said, and so they stood for a little while, joining their grief and taking strength from each other to cheer the way of the man they both held dear.

Adrea went to the telephone, and then quietly back to the veranda to sit by Payne, though she dreaded his awakening, perhaps from some dream in which he had again seen the sun, and the sky, and the blue water, as he had seen them all his life, back to the cruel shock of darkness.

She heard Allan moving about the studio; heard him open the cupboard, and then the clink of glass against glass. Then the door was shut and locked, and he came to the veranda to say good-bye.

Payne stirred, and awoke with a start. For a second he sat erect, every muscle tense, his face drawn as if in an agony of sudden suffering. Then with a groan he sank back.

Adrea spoke and touched his hand, as if to let him know that someone was near, and he bravely shook off his horror, and asked for Lawrence.

Allan, seeing that he could scarcely escape, told Payne he had been called to town, assuring him that he would return next day, perhaps with results.

"Well, good-bye until to-morrow," he concluded. "I must be off. There's the village chariot coming down the road now."

He waved his hand to Adrea as he ran down the drive to meet the carriage, and she stood watching until he was out of sight.

Bearing in mind the directions of Dr. Thomas, that Payne was to be kept quiet, Adrea went

back to the veranda with the determination not to allow her patient to dwell on the mission upon which Lawrence had started, and although curious herself concerning the detective-like actions she had seen going on in the studio, she forbore to mention anything of it to Payne.

She found him lying back in his chair, with his arms thrown above his head, his eyes closed, to all appearances asleep. She moved quietly to her chair and took up her work.

"Adrea?" he inquired.

"Yes, Morton; do you want anything? Shall I pick up the story from the point where you dozed off? I know the very sentence, I think."

"You must have been watching me pretty closely. You have a big advantage of me now, Adrea," he said, grimly striving to talk lightly.

She was silent, a little hurt that he should even jestingly accuse her of a morbid interest in his infirmity. Then it occurred to her that he must be already beginning to acquire that abnormal sensitiveness common to the blind, and a feeling of pain and pity gathered anew at her heart.

"Don't you want to smoke?" she asked. "It seems strange for you not to be puffing at a cigarette or something. I don't believe you have tasted tobacco to-day."

He gave a short laugh. "No, I believe I haven't. However, I'll try if you like, though it will be like smoking in the dark—precious little

enjoyment. I can't see the smoke, and that is more than half the fun."

"You shall try, at any rate," she decided, and ran in for his smoking tray.

"You must light it for me, you know," he said, when she offered him a cigarette, and blushing, and blackening the end by holding the match too long, she did as he bade her.

Payne lay back, and she watched him as he drew the smoke deeply into his lungs, exhaling it in a thin, blue cloud.

"Is it good?" she asked.

"Some," he said, but she felt that he was saying it merely not to disappoint her, for after a few minutes he quietly tossed away the cigarette, half smoked, and dropped back into his old posture of careless discouragement.

The incident, small as it was, disquieted her; for to her mind it indicated that Payne was giving up too easily. She saw how it might be—that gradually, as the days went by, dull, dreary and deadly monotonous, he would begin to lose his grip on things, his interest in life itself, and might readily fall into the rut of habitual helplessness, and finally become a burden to himself and those about him. She determined to save him from this, and scarcely had the danger presented itself before she began to plan little ways by which she might guide him safely past the early crisis that was sure to come.

Instinctively, she felt that her effort would

require the utmost tact, the closest observation, the greatest patience to carry it to success, but she firmly resolved that Morton Payne should not sink into decadence without her having first done everything that was humanly possible to save him.

She was aware that loss of sight at his age was a far more serious deprivation than it would have been had he been a younger man, still in the years of resilience and pliability, when the habits of life had not yet become fixed, and the work of adapting himself to his plight would have been far lighter. But he was past thirty, and she realized that each day, almost at every turn, he would run headlong against the stone wall of his new and disheartening limitations.

To ease the first, rough contact, to foresee and forestall the shocks that he must suffer, inevitably, even in the simple actions of daily life, should henceforth be her obligation, her duty, to come before all else.

CHAPTER XXI

LAWRENCE GETS RESULTS

IT was very early the next morning when Adrea awoke, confusedly aware that something had disturbed her. She lay a moment, listening, and then, hearing the sound of a footstep upon the gravel outside, she slipped out of bed and ran to the window.

Through the morning mist she saw, dimly, the shape of a motor-car, standing near the gate, and the form of a man, disengaging himself slowly and stiffly from behind the steering wheel. Once on the ground he pushed up his cap, and she saw it was Lawrence.

He stamped his feet heavily and came slowly up the walk, shivering inside his motor coat, as if the fog-chill had bitten him to the marrow. He looked up suddenly, as if aware that someone was watching, and saw her. Adrea made a quick sign that she had seen him, and slipping into a silken *negligé* made her way swiftly downstairs.

"I'm half frozen," Lawrence said, as she opened the door. "I was afraid no one would be awake, and I should have to shiver out there until the chattering of my teeth should rouse you."

"What is it, Allan? Have you found him?"

the girl asked, as he came inside, and softly closed the door.

"Not yet," he said, grimly, dropping his wet coat across a chair. "Lord, I didn't realize it could be so cold in mid-summer."

"You poor man!" exclaimed Adrea. "You *are* cold. Come into the studio and I'll start a fire. You must have some hot coffee."

Together they entered the big room. There was a basket of kindlings by the chimney-place, and Adrea had seized a handful when Lawrence took the fire-building into his own hands. As she relinquished the shavings, a bit of paper fluttered to the floor, and as Lawrence bent over the hearth, she stooped and picked it up.

He had started the blaze and was turning to the basket for more wood, when he noticed her staring fixedly at the crumpled fragment in her hand.

"What is that?" he asked, whimsically, "a missing will, the key to a hidden treasure, or a lost recipe for jam?"

Apparently she hardly heard him, for she continued to stare at what was written on the paper. Something in her face silenced the levity on his lips, and for a moment he watched her. Her eyes lifted for an instant and rested intently on the door of the cupboard. Her lips moved as if she were reaching the result of a calculation.

"What is it, Adrea?" Lawrence demanded.

For answer she handed him what she had

found. Lawrence took it, wonderingly, his eyes still on the girl's face. Then he read.

It was Dr. Bradley's formula of the decoction of wood alcohol and whiskey that had blinded his patient in the next town.

An instant change came over the man's face. His smile disappeared, and his mouth grew hard. She saw his hand leap to the breast of his coat and draw forth a folded paper. Then he knelt where the fire threw out its strong light and compared the two.

"By God!" he muttered. "Identical! It's the last link!"

Adrea dropped down on her knees beside him, peering over his arm at the sheets he held. With slow horror creeping into her eyes she sought his face.

"Lavigne!" she gasped. "Allan, you have discovered something! Tell me, was it—Lavigne?"

"Yes," he answered, "it was Lavigne."

"Oh!" she breathed, "I knew it! I knew the moment I found that paper, there in the basket. It is too horrible, almost, for belief."

She dropped down and sat a moment with her face buried in her hands, rocking gently to and fro, the firelight shimmering on her silken robe, and on the great braid of her hair that fell over her shoulder, its ends coiling in her lap.

Lawrence, still intently examining the prescription-blank, suddenly gave a low exclamation,

and rose. He seized Payne's magnifying glass from the table, and was back in an instant, bending again over the wrinkled sheet.

"Ah-h-h!" Adrea heard him cry, in a tone that seemed half torture, half satisfaction. "He's even left his signature."

The girl raised her head.

"How could a man be so inhuman, so fiendish? Tell me why you suspected him? You have been working hard to find this out. Why didn't you tell me, so that I might help?"

Lawrence looked at her in surprise. The tone of her voice, her attitude, her expression had in a flash completely changed. A moment ago she had seemed a mere girl, shocked beyond utterance at the revelation of Lavigne's direful work. Now, she was suddenly a woman, stirred and awakened by a depth of feeling that caused him to stare at her in wonder. It would go hard with Lavigne, he found himself thinking, should he at that moment enter the room.

"Where did you find this paper?" he asked.

"I picked it up with the shavings just now. Lavigne must have gotten hold of it the night Bradley was here, before he sailed. It was not in that basket two days ago, for I, myself, filled it with fresh kindlings the day before yesterday."

Lawrence nodded. "I see," he said. "Lavigne found the paper where Bradley dropped it. He tossed it into the wood-basket only night before last, after it had served his purpose. He forgot

that wood-baskets are occasionally emptied and refilled."

"And the paper you took from your pocket," she asked, pointing to it. "What is that?"

"That," said Lawrence, slowly, "is the analysis of the gin Morton Payne has been using from the jug in the cupboard there, poisoned with wood alcohol by Julius Lavigne."

He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the cupboard, lifting the jug by its wicker handle, and setting it on the table. By its side he placed the white flask, marked "Deodorized Methyl Alcohol, Poison." Adrea shuddered as she noted the black death's head on the red label.

"There," said Lawrence, "is the evidence."

"Tell me," commanded the girl.

"My first suspicion came when Dr. Thomas told me that he believed the optic nerve was probably affected. It was strange that he could not find a cause for such a sudden disorder, and it set me thinking. Then I remembered Bradley's story of the blind man, and the thought that this might be the same thing suddenly came to my mind. At first, I fancied it might be that the gin Payne had been drinking was bad. Then I thought of Lavigne. It was staggering, but I saw how it might be possible.

"The motive was plain enough. Lavigne was intensely anxious over his picture. He wanted it to win. He knew that it could not if Morton's should be finished—for he had seen Morton's."

"Had seen it?" cried Adrea. "When?"

"A long time ago, at the time of the fire. I found it out then, and I should have warned Payne, but he hates suspiciousness so that I refrained. I thought, with so many of you in the house, it would be safe enough.

"Well, the moment I formed my theory I set to work. When Lavigne stole his look at the picture, he left his mark upon it—the imprint of his left thumb, clear and distinct in the fresh paint, down in one corner. It is there still. I knew it was his, for the next day at his studio I found its mate on his own palette.

"Yesterday, I examined the cupboard." Lawrence picked up the magnifying glass, and handed it to Adrea.

"Look," he said, "on the inside of the door, near the bottom."

Adrea looked. "Yes," she said, "the print of a man's thumb."

"That," Lawrence went on, "was made when he opened the door. He had oiled the lock to make it silent, and got some grease on his hand. There's another print on the alcohol bottle, and some of his fingers, too. You can see them near the bottom. That bottle hasn't been used, I believe, since Bradley told us his opinion of the stuff. So the only marks are Lavigne's oily skin-prints. Then there's another, on the neck of the demijohn.

"Finally," said Lawrence, picking up the

prescription-blank, "here is the formula that told him the exact quantity of poison to use to make a man blind. He kept the paper until his last visit here, the other night. He wanted it found in some out-of-the-way place, as if it had been lying there all the time. That was why he dropped it in the wood-basket. But his hand was wet from his dripping oil-coat, and a little sticky, so here is his signature again, in the corner, as truly his as if it were written with a pen.

"This analysis," Lawrence continued, picking up the larger sheet of paper, "is of the gin in the demijohn, and it was made by a chemist in town, last evening. You see, it shows the exact, or nearly the exact proportion of wood alcohol that Bradley's other formula shows. Lavigne must have had a good eye, to measure the contents of the jug so accurately."

"But when," asked Adrea, staring at Lawrence, as he unfolded his tale, "when could he have done this? He never had an opportunity to be here alone."

Lawrence smiled, grimly. "Do you remember the night you heard the burglar?" he asked.

"You mean——"

"I mean that in all likelihood, when you came down here and closed that door, Julius Lavigne was crouching somewhere in this room, watching you, and wondering whether he would have to kill you to make his get-away."

"Oh!" cried the girl, "if I had known!"

"When you heard the door first, he was coming in. When you heard it the second time, it was the cupboard he was closing. The third time was when he went out."

"And after that! It was after that," she whispered, "that he began to come so regularly in the evenings, and they always drank their good-night drinks together."

"Yes," said Lawrence, "Lavigne was going to be sure his victim took his dose with regularity."

"Then," went on the girl, shuddering at the recollection, "that was what I read in his eyes, his horrible, snaky eyes, that seemed to watch, and watch, and gloat at something I could not see, could not understand. Oh, Allan, are there really such men in the world, such devils? It seems impossible that beings like that can live, unpoisoned by their own venom."

"And have you thought," Lawrence said, "that his showing you his picture yesterday morning was a part of his plan, a mere device to give him an excuse for going away? See, how cunning the fiend was. He figured out, God knows how, almost to a day, how long it would take the poison to do its work, and on that very day he furnished himself with a plausible reason for disappearing.

"We have very little real evidence against him, evidence that might not be broken down by a good lawyer before a jury. It is mostly circumstantial. Lavigne knows that, and is

banking on it, though he will take good care to keep out of the way."

"But you put men on the watch," said the girl. "Have they seen nothing, heard nothing of him?"

"Nothing. He probably carefully planned his get-away long in advance and took pains to cover all his tracks. I shall keep up the search. It may be a long time, but I shall find him, and when I do——"

Lawrence stopped, his teeth set hard, his hands clenching and unclenching, as if his fingers were impatient for that which they were capable of doing.

Adrea's gaze fell on the jug and bottle on the table, and she started as if she had seen a viper. She stretched out her hand and pointed.

"That is the cause of Morton Payne's blindness. That was what did it."

Then a note of awe and of horror broke her voice almost to a whisper. "But the reason, Allan, the reason! *I* am the reason behind it all!"

"You!"

"Yes, I. If I had been willing to come down here with my aunt for Julius Lavigne alone, it wouldn't have happened. If Morton Payne had not come too, he would not be lying up there now, waiting for the light he will never, never see again. It was because I was a coward, because I feared Julius Lavigne, distrusted him, and was

afraid of him, that I refused to come unless Morton could come, too."

She dropped down in the big chair in which Payne had sat when she ran in to him, breathless and excited with her story the day before, and leaning her head against the arm she broke down completely, sobbing in her misery like a little child.

Lawrence sat down beside her, and laid his arm across the slim, shaking shoulders.

"Why, Adrea, girl, you must never think such thoughts as that. Morton would be grieved to the heart if he knew you were blaming yourself. You had nothing to do with it. It's preposterous. You are nervous and nearly done up. Please don't sob so."

With his big hand he stroked her hair, and after a while, under his gentle touch and his quiet talk, she grew calmer. Still he sat there, comforting her, for she seemed so young, and grieved, and hurt, and she had shown him so clearly where her heart was.

"Tell me, Allan," she said, when she could speak again, "is there any hope at all for him?"

Lawrence hesitated. She must be told. It would be better for her to know now.

"No, I'm afraid there isn't, dear," he answered gently. "You remember what Dr. Bradley said when he told of his own case? The poison destroys the nerve. When that is gone, nothing can restore it."

She took it bravely, better than he had dared to hope, and rising, she went to the fireplace and leaned her forehead against the high mantel, looking down into the dancing flames.

"Allan," she said, after she had thought a little while, "we mustn't tell Morton anything about this, at least not now. It would just disturb him, and embitter him, and do him harm. We won't, will we?"

"No, Adrea."

"And when the time comes, if it ever does; I mean if you should ever find Lavigne, and he should have to know, I want to tell him myself. Will you let me?"

"Yes, Adrea."

"Thank you, Allan. You are very, very good to me."

He rose, and went and stood beside her.

"Adrea," he said, "who could help being 'good' to you? No better, sweeter, braver girl ever lived. God bless you!"

She looked up at him quickly and saw that his eyes were bright with starting tears, and then, with an impulse that was as sweet and as unbidden as human sympathy itself, she laid her arm about his neck, and kissed him, softly, on the cheek.

Then she slipped away out of the room, like a shadow, and left him alone by the fire, knowing that he understood.

Yet, even so, when she was gone, he looked

after her for a long moment, and then at the flickering fire once more. And a sigh forced itself from between his lips—a long, hard-held breath, that came unevenly, as if the heart in his breast was giving up, finally and forever, something which had come to be a part of it.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR THE WOSTENHOLM

THE breeze had sprung up outside; the warm, summer sun was dissipating the morning mists; and through the big studio window Lawrence could already see the pale blue of the sky.

Noticing the jug and bottle that stood on the table, grim evidence of the tragedy of a man's life, he put them back in the cupboard and locked the door.

Absently, his eyes roved about the familiar walls, noting, here and there, some sketch in black and white, or some unframed water-color of Payne's. The big easel with the curtained portrait of Adrea stood back in a corner, mournful and neglected.

Lawrence walked slowly over to it and pulled back the cloth. The light was bad, and he moved the easel out. He had not really looked at the picture since the time of the fire, and as he stepped back to get the full effect, he found himself staring at it in surprise.

So far as the face and the figure were concerned the portrait was practically finished. The background was merely sketched in, the coloring sug-

gested without detail, but sufficiently to give the figure a setting. Payne might have finished the remaining work without his model.

But what caught and held Lawrence's attention was the expression of the face. The girl was seated among the roses on the old stone bench, with a letter in her hand. She had just finished reading it, and was looking up, as if repeating its words. A little smile was coming to her lips, and her eyes, deeply glowing with a tenderness that was unfathomable, seemed to see some bright vision of happiness.

Her whole posture was one of lightness and hope and joy. From the way her hands held the letter, one almost expected to see her raise it and lay it gently against her heart.

The warm tints of the skin, the rich coloring and the sheen of the hair, the firm, youthful lines of the figure were all caught with marvelous perfection. But above all, standing out clearly and unequivocally, was the purity and sweetness of character of the girl herself, so truthfully, so sincerely expressed, that the beholder knew instinctively, at the first sight, that he was gazing straight into the open book of a girl's heart.

So completely absorbed was Lawrence in his contemplation, that he did not see or hear Adrea as she entered the room. She carried a tray, on which was a sputtering coffee percolator, and seeing Lawrence gazing at the canvas, she set it down on the table and silently joined him.

For a moment he did not speak. Then, turning, he held out both hands to her.

"Adrea, it's wonderful, wonderful!"

Surprised, she hardly knew what to say, and turning again, they both stood looking at her counterpart upon the easel. Lawrence was the first to speak.

"Has Mort spoken of it at all, since—?"

"Only once. But I know he has been thinking, and grieving. He was so happy as he painted it, and he had such hope and enthusiasm. It seems almost wrong to uncover it—now."

"And you must have caught his mood, Adrea," Lawrence said thoughtfully, not taking his eyes from the canvas. "He must have communicated some of his happiness to you, I think."

"Yes," said the girl, "I think he did. I was happy—more so, perhaps, than I knew. Yesterday, after you had gone to town, I came in here and looked at it for a long time. It seemed to comfort me, somehow, and drive away the memory of that other picture, that awful woman who looked up at me from Julius Lavigne's easel."

"Adrea," Lawrence said, suddenly, "we must enter this portrait for the Wostenholm."

The girl's eyes grew wide and incredulous.

"Yes, it must be done. We must see that it is exhibited."

"But," Adrea cried, "it is not finished. They would not accept it."

"Leave that to me. I know the committee.

I came near being on it myself; would have been if I hadn't known Payne was to be an exhibitor. I was afraid my friendship might make me unfair. But I can fix it. I shall only have to tell them of his misfortune. You'll see."

"But," objected the girl, "perhaps Morton would not like to compete on that basis. He would never countenance anything that would make him feel that he was being favored on account of his misfortune, or that he was being admitted because of a friend's influence."

"Then he must not know," Lawrence answered, quickly. "We will have it entered without telling him—put a dummy canvas on the easel here, if necessary. Adrea, you don't realize, perhaps, that this is a great picture. I have been called a good judge. Some of the best collectors in New York ask my opinion before they buy. You know I am not speaking with any egotism. I do not praise this portrait because Morton is my friend, but because I sincerely believe it is one of the best pieces of work that has been done by an American artist for a very long time. It must have a place, finished or unfinished, in the first American Salon."

"You are wrong, Allan," Adrea said, "when you say I do not realize that this is a wonderful portrait. I do, perhaps, more than you, or anyone else ever can."

Lawrence thought a moment.

"Suppose," he said, "that I should not be able

to find that picture of Lavigne's, and he succeeded in getting it into the exhibition."

The girl looked at him, the slow look of distress that he had seen once before that day, coming into her eyes.

"It is possible, you know. If the committee accepted it, nothing could prevent its being hung. Do you think Morton would then sit tamely by, and see you placed in the position in which that monstrous portrait would put you? I know he would go down on his knees to the committee and beg them to admit his picture, if only to give the world the truth. You see, I know Lavigne's work, even though I have not seen this picture, for I have seen the look of horror in your eyes—and I know Lavigne."

Confronted by this possibility, and admitting that Payne, however loath to take advantage of his position, would most certainly insist on justice being done her, Adrea was forced to agree.

"I shall not need to make any plea," he told her, "the bare mention of Morton's name will be enough."

So it was settled, and drawing the cloth once more over the canvas, Lawrence rolled the easel back to its corner.

"My, but that coffee smells good. I'd quite forgotten that I was supposed to be a cold and hungry wayfarer," he said, approaching the table, where Adrea was already making preparations to serve him.

He pulled out his watch. "Only a little after seven," he exclaimed. "What time could it have been when I arrived? It was positively inhuman to get you up at any such hour."

"I didn't mind," Adrea said, drawing a steaming cup. "I was awake, and finding someone to talk to was much better for me than lying there, thinking. Will you take two lumps?"

"None at all, thanks; but plenty of cream, please. That looks and smells fit for the gods."

"Tell me why you were so anxious to get here so early," asked Adrea. "You must have started from town in the small hours."

"Well," Lawrence replied, "it was rather late when I reached the city and I had a good deal to do. In the first place, I found that the detectives I had sent to watch the station had seen no one resembling Lavigne, and nobody had passed them with anything that could possibly be taken for a painter's canvas. I consulted with the man at the agency, and we mapped out a regular hunt, my part in which lies in tracing Lavigne from this end.

"Next I went to Anderson, the chemist, whom I happen to know rather well, and set him to work analyzing the sample of Payne's liquor that I had brought from here. He couldn't do it at once—had a dinner engagement or something—so I had to wait. It was after ten o'clock when he returned home, and well past midnight before he had finished and given me his report.

"As you saw, it confirmed my suspicions, absolutely, but, after all, it was only circumstantial evidence. The paper you found is circumstantial, too, but the thumb-print on it helps to take it out of that class, and the other print on the alcohol bottle, together with his running away, makes it look nasty indeed for Mr. Julius Lavigne. When I got the analysis I was too much wrought up to think of bed, so I jumped into my car and came straight down."

Lawrence had paused as he spoke Lavigne's name, and Adrea again saw his lips compress themselves into a firm line.

"And if you find him?" questioned Adrea, her lips parted and her breath coming quickly.

"*When* I find him," corrected Lawrence, grimly, "when I find him he will be arrested and tried for attempted murder."

"Murder!" cried the girl, "I thought you were sure he meant to blind, not kill."

"He did; but dosing a man with deadly poison is a dangerous form of amusement, as the law looks at it. To clear himself of such a charge, he would have to confess exactly what he did intend to do. There is where we have him."

"What will you do, now, to trace him?"

"Oh, I shall merely interview the station agent and the man who drove the carriage, and then the train crew. The conductor or the brakeman will certainly remember if he got off at some station en route, as he must have done to avoid

the men who were waiting for him. Then, he may have taken a carriage or an automobile, and it ought not to be hard to find the driver, and discover where he left the canvas."

"And then?"

"Then, if it is humanly possible, I shall get hold of it, and destroy it."

"Destroy it? Would you dare do that?"

"Yes," said Lawrence, quietly. "I dare."

"But if you can't get hold of it?" persisted the girl.

"In that case, I can only do my best to keep it out of the exhibition. Lavigne has probably left it with some dealer in New York whom he trusts, with instructions to see that it is entered for the Wostenholm, and reaches the exhibition safely. He has, no doubt, taken every possible step to guard it until its safe delivery, and unless the dealer, when we find him, be open to bribery, we shall have a hard task."

"And all these detectives you are hiring," said Adrea. "It will be very expensive, won't it? Are you sure Morton can afford to spend so much—now?"

Lawrence looked at her for a moment before replying.

"Adrea," he said, finally, "you have hit on just the point that worried me—at first. I was prepared to keep up the chase and go deep into my own bank account if necessary, but it won't be necessary, either for me or for Mort."

"How is that?" she asked, quickly. "Who is to pay?"

"While I was waiting for Anderson's analysis," Lawrence said, "I dropped into the club to see if, by any chance, Lavigne had sent word where to forward his mail. The place was nearly deserted, but as I was about to leave, someone hailed me, and turning back I ran slap into Mr. Wostenholm."

"The Mr. Wostenholm who endowed the exhibition?"

"The very man. Charles J. Wostenholm, citizen of the United States, and the whole wide world, for that matter."

"And you told him the story?"

"I told him the story, without naming either you, or Payne, or Lavigne, and he listened very intently, and with great indignation. When I was through he said:

" 'Put the best men in this country on the scent, son, and send the bill to me. Find the devil if you have to chase him around the globe. Find him! and don't think of the expense. I'll take care of that. I want to have a hand in this, if you'll let me.' "

"I protested at first, but then I thought that it might be a long chase, and a still longer one without the best men on the trail. And I thought of Mort, and swallowed his pride for him, as well as my own, and we shook hands on it."

"I should like to meet Mr. Wostenholm,"

Adrea said. "I have heard you and Morton speak of him so admiringly. He must be a splendid type, isn't he? Fine, and generous, and big hearted?"

"Yes," said Lawrence, judicially. "He's all of that. I never met a man I admired more. All he's got he won himself, by the hardest kind of work. He's self-made, from the bottom up."

"Tell me about him," urged the girl with interest.

"Of course," said Lawrence, poking the fire into a cheerful blaze, "I know little of his history that the whole world does not know, but I have met him, often, and I have been interested enough to study him pretty closely.

"He impresses me as a man with tremendous strength of character—a man whose likes and dislikes are strong, but who has a perfect balance of mind and is never ruled, except by cold judgment. I have imagined, from little things I have heard, and fragments that he himself has let drop, that this part of him has been self-made, as well as all else he possesses. In his youth, perhaps, he was not so strong, or so well balanced, and he made mistakes, vital ones, and these may have taught him restraint and toleration, and the value of dispassionate thought and action.

"He was born somewhere in the Middle West, I believe, and followed the great tide of humanity that poured across the Mississippi just after the Civil War. He probably lived as wild a life as

any young fellow of the times. He married, I believe, but lost his wife shortly afterward. That, I think, was the great sorrow of his life. He never speaks of it, and he has never married again, but I know with what a reverence he regards the ties of home and family, and what pain it gives him to see the homes of his friends and his acquaintances broken asunder by the divorce court.

"He said to me one day, 'Son'—he generally calls me that, for some reason—'Son,' he said, 'when you marry, marry a good woman, and stick to her and believe in her, and be true to her, forever. All the wealth under the canopy can offer you nothing to compare with a wife, and a home and your children.'

"And when he said it his voice was as gentle as a woman's and I saw a big tear roll down his cheek into his beard, and lie there glistening."

Adrea looked up at him quickly.

"He is a good man, Allan," she said quietly. "I wish I could meet him, sometime."

"You shall," promised Lawrence. "I should like to bring him here and tell him the whole story, for he has met Payne and liked him, but if our picture is going in, of course he mustn't know. It would look too much like playing for favoritism."

"Yes," agreed Adrea. "If Morton should *win* after he had been down here, and there were even a whisper, it would be worse than not winning—worse, even, than having Lavigne win."

"Don't suggest anything so dire," said Lawrence with a short laugh. "Lavigne can't win. Lies don't win. If he should get his picture hung, I'll make them hang Mort's next it, and we'll see which is the stronger, truth or falsehood."

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE ALTAR OF FRIENDSHIP

IT had become Lawrence's particular business to pick up the hither end of Julius Lavigne's trail, and to trace him, at least, as far as the point where he had left the train on his presumable journey to New York.

The detective with whom Lawrence had consulted had agreed that Allan could learn more at the Fairhaven end, without exciting comment, than a stranger, and it was deemed best that the pursuit should be conducted as quietly as possible.

Knowing that Lavigne had undoubtedly taken the train that left the station at eleven-thirty, the village hack-driver had been given orders to have his equipage at Payne's gate at an hour that would give ample margin before train time.

Once in the two-seated cut-under, with the horses jogging easily down the road, Lawrence wondered how he could best approach the driver on the subject of Lavigne's departure, when that talkative individual solved the problem for him.

"I'm glad there's somebody on the P'int that's got feelin's for man-flesh an' hoss-flesh," volunteered the man, leaning one arm on the frayed

back of the seat and assuming a conversational tone.

"Indeed," Lawrence returned encouragingly, "how is that?"

"I like to treat folks right, but I like to have 'em treat me right, too," said the driver, growing confidential.

"Now, that Mr. Lavigne over there in the next house, he ain't got no thought for nobody nor nothin', jest exceptin' his own self. Why, he called me up yis'dy at ten minutes to eleven, and wanted me to harness up, and git down there to his place, and fetch him to the station for the 'leven thirty. I says, 'Mr. Lavigne,' I says, 'I don' know's I kin make it'—it bein' prutty late, and a hot day an' all.

"He said 'I gotter make it, an' come by the back road, too.' Now what was a feller go'n to do? I told him I'd do my best, an' I done it. Hauled that big hack—he specified the hack, though 'twarn't rainin' nor nothin'—hauled that big hack down by the back road, got him and his traps and took him clear back the same way, and had most ten minutes to spare after I'd landed him. Hosses latherin', and me a swearin', and him a settin' inside, hangin' on to a big paintin', or somethin', done up in oilcloth, an' leaving a trail o' cigareet smoke out the winder, like a tug-bo't burnin' soft coal.

"An' after all that," concluded the Jehu in deep disgust, "he told me to hang up the ride,

an' never even give me the price of a piece o' chewin' tobaccer for sweatin' my team twice over that back road."

"He was in a hurry, probably, and forgot it," said Lawrence, making Lavigne's excuses as a prod to the driver's indignation. It had its effect.

"Hurry!" he exclaimed, "I should say he was. Kept a singin' out to me to drive faster all the way, an' every now an' then stickin' his head out the winder, like he was expectin' to be follered."

"If he was in such a hurry," Lawrence suggested, "I should think he would have gone by the straight road. The back way must be much longer."

"Full quarter of a mile," confirmed the hackman in a tone of grave injury. "An' him in a hurry!"

"Say, Mr. Lawrence," he presently confided, leaning farther over the back of the seat and dropping his voice to a mysterious whisper. "There's somethin' kinder queer about that feller, the way he sneaked off from here yis'dy. He didn't want no one to see him. That's why he went the back road."

The hackman's tone took on a note of triumph, as if he had arrived suddenly at the correct answer to an abstruse problem.

"There warn't no one *to* see him, exceptin' Payne's folks. That there paintin' he was takin' so much care of—I reckon it was *his* all right,

but it looked kinder suspicious to me. Say," he ventured further, seeing no rebuff in Lawrence's eye, "they haint missed nothin' o' the sort to Payne's place, have they?"

Lawrence replied that nothing had been taken, so far as he knew.

"I didn't know," said the driver, evidently far from satisfied with his fare's uncommunicativeness. "Seein' you and that stranger that come with ye yis'dy an' went back by the next train, made me think maybe there was somethin' wrong."

With a cluck and a "giddap" to his team, the hackman relapsed into silence. The station hove into view down the long, straight road; the horses quickened their pace, and in another five minutes Lawrence parted with his pilot, whom he left grinning his thanks at enough silver in his palm to supply a week's "chewin'."

The station agent was busy at the telegraph key as Lawrence stepped up to the window to buy his ticket.

"Mornin', Mr. Lawrence," said the official, as he finished and came to the wicket. "Come down in your auto? I didn't see ye git off no train."

"Yes," said Lawrence, "I came down this morning. Is the eleven-thirty on time?"

"Yes, sir. Right on the dot this mornin'. First time for three days, too. How's everybody on the Point, Mr. Lawrence? No one sick down to Mr. Payne's is they?"

Lawrence, counting his change, did not hurry a reply, and the agent kept on.

"Why I asked," he explained, "was seein' you an' that big doctor from the city comin' down yis'dy. I heard Mis' Leighton was up to the village in the mornin' telegraphin' ye to bring him. But of course," he added, as if not wishing to make it appear that he was curious, "he might 'a been comin' for somethin' else.

"I was tellin' Mr. Lavigne about the telegram when he was buyin' his ticket yis'dy. He said he didn't know of any sickness, but he looked so kinder queer when he said it, that I was wonderin'."

"No," Lawrence told the man. "No one is ill. Dr. Thomas is a friend of Mr. Payne's. They had some business, I believe."

"That's good," said the agent. "There comes your train now, Mr. Lawrence."

So Lavigne had learned of Dr. Thomas' visit, Lawrence reflected as he dropped into a seat in the nearly-vacant car. He must have guessed, of course, the reason of it, and that would make him all the more anxious to get away as quickly and as quietly as possible.

He had indeed made close connections, for had it been known that he was aware of his victim's blindness before leaving, suspicion might have been directed to him because of his flight.

As it was, however, he had already started before he learned of the success of his crime,

and having, as he supposed, covered his steps well, he might now be less careful of his movements.

The entire plan was clear. Lavigne had timed his insidious poison well. The exposure of the portrait to Adrea's startled and horrified eyes had been deliberate.

From what the girl had told him, Lawrence was sure Lavigne had intended her to see it, while he, hiding behind the curtains, stood ready to prevent the very attempt she had made to destroy the hateful image.

Her outcry over the portrait would be sufficient reason for his going.

He must have known that, in a day or two at most, the methylated spirit with which he had dosed Payne's liquor, would have its effect, and when the blow fell he would be well away, leaving no scent by which he could be followed, even were he suspected.

But Lavigne, Lawrence reasoned, could not have been expecting suspicion, for he had probably gauged the amount of liquor left in the demijohn to such a nicety that he was certain it would be drunk to the last drop before it had its effect.

Then there would be none left for analysis, and in that case, even though he might possibly be suspected, nothing could be proved against him. He would be safe.

But here was the fatal flaw. The poison had

worked before all the liquor was gone. The analysis had been made, and the hand of the law was already unbending to point its long finger at him, unerringly, inevitably, stretching out like a tentacle to seize him and draw him in, wherever he might be.

Lawrence had purposely taken a seat in the rear of the last car, where he would have a better chance of questioning the conductor after he had made his round of the train.

When that official appeared, Lawrence handed him his ticket with one hand, and a cigar with the other.

"Thanks," he said, taking both and tucking a pink slip into Lawrence's hat-band. "Can't smoke on duty, you know. I'll enjoy it when we get in."

He dropped into the opposite seat and began to sort his tickets and make his note-book record.

"By the way," began Lawrence, "a friend of mine who went up to town with you yesterday left a small parcel in his seat. He telephoned me in the afternoon, knowing I was coming up this morning, and asked me to inquire about it. It was a small, flat package wrapped in brown paper," he invented, glibly. "And he said he had probably dropped it between the seats.'

The conductor shook his head. "Nothing reported," he said; "but I'll ask the brakeman."

"Tom," he called to that individual, who was coming down the aisle. "See anything of a

package wrapped in brown paper when we got in yesterday? Friend of this gentleman's thinks he left it in his seat."

Tom shook a negative head. "Nothin' doin'," he answered. "What car was he in?"

Lawrence repeated the business of the cigar.

"He didn't say what car, but you may have noticed him, because he carried a big painter's canvas, covered with oilcloth, and was probably very careful of it."

"Sure," said the brakeman, "I remember. He got on at Fairhaven and got off at Woodhaven, just the other side of Jamaica. I didn't see no little package, but the car was pretty well filled when he got off, and somebody might have pinched it easy enough."

"He got off at Woodhaven?" questioned Lawrence. "He didn't say anything about that."

"Yes, Woodhaven. I remember, because he was so mad when a big nigger with a broken cultivator wheel bumped into him. Last I saw, he was making for a big black automobile that was waiting at the end of the platform."

The two trainmen left to attend to the business of making the next stop, and Lawrence sat congratulating himself on the ease with which he had acquired his information.

It was as he had supposed. Lavigne had left the train before reaching the city, and had gone on by automobile. To find out the number of the car, and so trace the garage from which it

had been ordered, was the next step, but here Lawrence decided to leave the trail and let the detectives take it up, Woodhaven being sufficiently far away to prevent the tongues of Fairhaven's gossips from wagging.

He left the train at Woodhaven, however, and made inquiries concerning the black automobile, its driver and its number, but no one about the station had noticed the car, particularly, and beyond the hazarded opinion that it did not belong in the town, and came either from Jamaica or some Brooklyn garage, Lawrence got no information.

The station agent had noticed Lavigne because of the picture he carried, and thought the car drove off toward Brooklyn. But this was all, and Lawrence, after eating an unsatisfactory luncheon in a small and greasy restaurant, took the next train back to the Inlet.

Evading the importunate station agent and the hackman, he struck off down the road, glad of the chance for a little exercise, and the opportunity to set his feet on something besides sun-baked asphalt.

It was well along in the afternoon, and the hush of a midsummer day was upon the countryside. The fragrance of the pines, through which the road led, was mingled, now and then, with the smell of the clover in full bloom in the meadowlands.

A hedge of late wild roses grew along an old

fence, and, braving their thorns, Lawrence stopped and gathered a great bunch for Adrea.

The spirit of peace, which enshrouded the landscape far and near, was compelling, and the thoughts of pursuit and punishment that had occupied his mind, became duller and more remote. His brisk walk slowed to a saunter, and for the rest of the way he strolled along, halting here and there to gaze at the little things that caught his quickened interest.

As he approached the house, his ear caught faint sounds of music, and as he drew nearer he recognized the sweet, plaintive melody of the "Wild Rose" from Adrea's violin. He paused and listened outside the gate. There was a piano accompaniment too. Could it be Payne, playing?

Softly he stole up the walk and through the hall. As he reached the door, the high, clear note of the violin died away, and he saw that it was Payne at the piano. Adrea stood near him, and as the bow drew the last, fine resonance from the strings, Lawrence saw her, with her instrument still caressed beneath her rounded chin, turn a look of such ineffable sweetness, and pity, and sorrow upon her blind companion, that he hesitated there upon the threshold, hardly knowing whether he would be welcome.

But in another instant the girl turned and saw him, and with a smile spoke his name and bade him enter.

"Don't stop, please," Lawrence said, "or I

shall go away. Play that Saint-Saens thing, Adrea, the one you played the night Bradley was here. Mort knows it by heart."

"You mean 'The Swan'?" asked the girl.

Lawrence nodded, and watched her as she laid her cheek against the violin while the bow began to rise and fall in the grace of perfect mastery. Payne, sitting in his darkness, seemed to have found a perfection of touch and expression, for his accompaniment was faultless.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Lawrence, as they finished. "I never heard a better rendering. You must have been practicing that."

"We have played it a number of times," said Payne, swinging around.

Lawrence looked at him keenly. His face was not so drawn and pale as it had been the day before, and he was even smiling.

Adrea laid her violin away in its case, and announced that she must go out and see how Mrs. Leighton and Aunt Margaret were getting on with dinner.

"Aunt Margaret," she said, "is simply crazy to be in the kitchen. I can't keep her out of it. She perfectly delights in hanging over the range, or in splashing in the dish-pan. She has boarded for so many years, poor thing, that the chance to cook again has fairly turned her head."

"Let her alone," said Payne, rising. "If she's happy, that's enough. I'll get her a stove of her own if Mrs. Leighton objects."

"Oh, she doesn't object. She and Aunt Margaret are the best of friends—so much so," Adrea confided in a stage-whisper, "that sometimes the dinner hour is a consideration secondary to pleasant converse."

"Let's go into the studio, then," said Payne. "This room is well enough for music, but the other is better for talk."

Lawrence could not help admiring the tact with which Adrea guided him to the door and through the hall. Walking near him, she let him feel her presence, not by actual touch or by laying a hand on his arm, but by her voice and movement, the light contact of her skirts, or the natural swing of her hand, as it barely brushed against him.

He was glad to note, too, that Payne walked with confidence, and bore himself well, as if he were determined not to yield to his infirmity, or pay to it the tribute of that half-conscious timidity of manner, hardly more, perhaps, than a forethought of caution, so often to be observed in those who have lost their sight.

He seemingly found his armchair by himself, dropped into it, and lifting a box containing cigarettes from a low stand, held them out to Lawrence.

When Adrea had gone, he lighted one himself and drew in the smoke, deeply.

"Isn't she—fine?" he said.

Lawrence threw his burned match into the

fireplace and crossed over to his friend. He was a little pale and he held himself a trifle tensely, as if preparing for an effort.

"Mort," he said, standing and looking down at him, "she's the best. You must marry her."

Payne started and sat upright, a slow flush rising in his face.

"What do you mean, Allan?"

"I mean that you love her. It sticks out all over you, and has for weeks. You need her, Mort. Why don't you ask her?"

There was a moment's silence. When Payne spoke there was a deep note of emotion in his voice that he could not hide.

"You're right, Allan. I do love her. I've loved her ever since she came. It's been growing and growing, here within me, until it seems as if it would burst out. But it must not."

He lay back and closed his eyes, and his hands, lying on the arms of his chair, suddenly clenched till the knuckles grew white.

"It shall not!" he breathed again.

Lawrence still stood as he had been, but his face was a little paler and in his eyes there was a look almost of suffering. But he spoke quietly.

"Why, Mort?"

"Do you think," Payne replied, leaning forward and speaking with an earnestness that was strange in him, "do you imagine, even if I knew she would consent, that I could ask that young girl, with all her talent, and her beauty, and her

sweetness to waste them on *me*, a blind man? Do you think I could ask her to tie herself down for the rest of her life to my helplessness? Could I, could any man in my position justify himself in ruining all the hope and gladness of a young heart like hers by taking it, and making a slave of it to his own selfishness? No! even if I knew she loved me, I could not ask that of her. I can only suffer, and thank God that I did not speak before this misfortune came."

He stopped a moment, then went on, with an effort.

"Allan," he said, in a tone that almost contained a note of awe. "It was only the night—the very night before this happened, that my lips were opened to tell her, when something—it must have been Providence itself—held my tongue. Think, no matter what her answer might have been, of the misery it would have caused. If it had been 'yes,' my affliction would have been equally hers. If it had been 'no,' she could not have stayed, even as long as this. And I should have lain here, thinking of her, without the sweetness and the comfort that just her presence in the house has brought to me."

"And how would it be," Lawrence asked, "if she cared for you? What if your suffering, which she is obliged to see, should make her suffer, doubly, through not being able to help you in the bearing of it? Do you think it would be fair to crush down your own love, and in doing

so bruise this young heart until it breaks, just because of your unwillingness to bind her to what you consider a life of self-sacrifice? If she loves you, there would be no sacrifice. Women are like that."

"I know," said Payne, almost bitterly. "But suppose it should be pity? Women are also like that. I have her pity now. I know it. I can feel it. But," he added, "there would hardly be a question of that with her. She—she loves somebody else, Allan."

Lawrence started. "How do you know that?" he asked, huskily.

"I have known it all along," Payne replied, dully. "I found her, one day, reading a letter out there among the roses. I could see the light in her eyes, and the song in her heart—almost on her lips. I painted her that way on my canvas, and as I painted, the image of her took its place in my heart. I can see it there now. I shall always see it, thank God. Even after she is gone, I shall have that left."

"A letter!" Lawrence repeated, half to himself. Could it be that there was someone else in Adrea's life, someone that he did not even know, someone who had known her before she had come into their lives, and who, all unbeknown, had won her for himself?

It seemed strangely impossible that it could be so. Her wholesome, happy nature had been always like an open book to Lawrence. There

was nothing hidden. There *could* not be someone else. If there had been he would have known it, for it was not like Adrea to hide anything. There was no duplicity in her. He stood silent, thinking.

All at once Payne rose, and stretching out his hand, laid it on his shoulder.

"Old fellow," he said, "I have always half believed it was your letter. I have lately more than half believed that you love Adrea yourself. Don't deny it. I have seen it in your eyes. Go in and win, Allan, for I am out of the running."

"*My* letter!" exclaimed Lawrence, facing him. "Man, what are you talking about? I never wrote to her in my life. I should have about as much chance with her as Bill, the hackman. Don't be an idiot, Mort. Don't overestimate your own helplessness. The doctor hasn't given you up yet. Even if he does, you have your manhood left. See what other men have done. Life is as open to you as it ever was. What were you before you began to paint this picture? One of the coming writers of the day. You can win the homage of the world with your pen, if you will; and with Adrea Varrick to help you, you will win it. Don't give up. Don't lose your nerve. Write, as you never wrote before. There's your occupation. Ask her to marry you. There's your life's happiness—and hers."

Lawrence paused, as if fearing that he had

said almost too much. Then he suddenly threw an arm about the other's shoulders.

"Tell her you love her, Mort," he whispered, "for if you don't she will have to ask you herself."

CHAPTER XXIV

BARRED FROM THE COMPETITION

IT was nearly a week after his last visit to Payne, that Lawrence, sitting in his office, was called to the private telephone booth.

"Hello, Mr. Lawrence?" questioned a voice. "Just a moment. The chief wants to talk."

Lawrence waited, wondering which of the various chiefs of his acquaintance it might be.

"Hello!" came sharply over the wire. "Mr. Lawrence? Well, this is Saunders of the Riggs Agency. We have some news for you on that little matter you handed over to us. Will you come down to our office, or shall I send the report there? You'll hardly care to take it over the wire, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, Saunders," called Lawrence, "I'll come down, thanks. In about ten minutes? All right. 'Bye."

Lawrence finished a dictation and took the elevator to the street.

Saunders ushered him into his private room and selected a paper from a filing-case.

"We had some trouble in getting hold of the garage people," he said, "and when we found

them, we had another delay, chasing up the chauffeur. He'd been fired, but we discovered him, finally, over in Williamsburg.

"It seems your friend Lavigne was counting on trouble. He didn't order the car by 'phone himself, but through a friend in Brooklyn, who is out of town, so the toll-call record did us no good, and we had to look up every garage in the borough. Well, to make a long story short, the chauffeur states that he took Lavigne to a place in East Thirty-third Street, an art shop, he says, where the canvas was left.

"Lavigne stayed in the place about twenty minutes. Then the man drove him to the Grand Central Station, and that is all he knows, except that his fare wasn't very liberal with a tip. We took him over to Thirty-third Street and he identified the place as Number —, a picture dealer's. Otto Von Hulst is the name.

"That is as far as we had orders to go, in that direction, I believe. As for Lavigne himself, we are fairly certain, from the hazy memory of the ticket man, that he bought transportation to Boston. It would be pretty difficult to trace him from there, I expect, but not impossible. We will undertake it, if you say so, Mr. Lawrence, but it may be a costly job."

Lawrence pondered in silence.

"No," he said finally. "We'll go no farther for the present. You've told me the most of what I wanted to know. I suspect that Lavigne sailed,

either from Boston or Montreal. If that is the case, knowing some of his haunts, I should be able to locate him on the other side about as quickly as you could."

"All right, Mr. Lawrence," returned Saunders. "We're glad you're satisfied, and we'll be at your service any time."

Lawrence took his leave, and walked up Broadway in deep thought.

Lavigne had, as he expected, left his picture with a dealer, whom, doubtless, he knew well and trusted. He had probably given him instructions to enter the portrait for the exhibition. There was a chance, of course, that the man would agree, if sufficient inducement were offered, not to carry out those instructions, but probably nothing would make him part with the painting.

As he walked along, Lawrence weighed the matter. It would certainly not do to approach the committee with a view to excluding Lavigne's canvas; for he would be sure to fail, and it would certainly prejudice Payne's chances for exhibition honors. Then, too, Morton might hear of it, and Lawrence knew that his friend would never countenance such a proceeding.

But he must do something. Leaving Payne entirely out of the question, after all it was Adrea who should be the first consideration. The thought of her, limned upon the canvas of this genius of evil, this man who saw wrong, drawn in the guise of heaven knew what, insulted,

the very soul of her twisted and warped into an unimaginable caricature, was too much for Lawrence.

He swung into a brisker pace, crossed to Fifth Avenue and hailed a motor 'bus.

At Thirty-third Street he got down and walked east, reading the signs. At last he saw the name and crossed the street. It was a small and rather dingy shop in a basement, but there were one or two good things in the window, which gave evidence that the dealer, though unknown to Lawrence, was one of some enterprise and standing.

As he went down the steps, he caught sight of a small, oldish man with a bushy, gray beard and black-rimmed spectacles. He came forward as Lawrence entered, bowing and smiling; and to his surprise greeted him by name.

"I am honored, Mr. Lawrence, by your visit to mine poor little den. It is der first time you have found me oudt, nicht wahr? So! I have not mooch, but dere are somedings here you vould enjoy, perhaps. Vill you just be seated von moment, please, and I vill show you."

Lawrence sat down while the little man bustled to the rear of the shop in search of some canvas he evidently had in mind. The use of his name by Von Hulst was a hint to proceed rather cautiously, though, he reflected, it was not so strange, after all, that the old fellow should recognize him. He might have been pointed out at some exhibition, where perhaps he had acted on the judging committee.

Again, if he was any reader of character at first sight, this old man was as honest as his kindly old face. But it would not do to approach him without being sure of his ground.

Von Hulst was returning, followed by a youth of twenty or thereabouts, a stocky pleasant-looking youngster, with a broad, pleasing smile and a sprouting beard.

"Dis is Heinie, my son, Mr. Lawrence," Von Hulst volunteered. "He helps me in der place here. He goes to der Duvelle School, and he is getting on quite vell. I am so proud! And next year, if all is vell, he goes bei der old coontrie to study der great Flemish painters."

Heinie, abashed, nodded a grinning greeting to the visitor, and setting a small oil *genre* on the show easel, promptly disappeared

Lawrence, playing for an opening, examined, and praised, and admired, as the old dealer brought his chief treasures eagerly forward. He seemed so sincere in his delight at showing them, so simple and guileless in his manner and his conversation, that Lawrence hardly had the heart even to draw him out.

Finally he made the plunge.

"Mr. Lavigne, whom I know very well, has spoken of you several times. You handle some of his work, I believe."

"Ja, I haf done somedings mit Mr. Lavigne, but, ah vell, if you know his vork, you know dot it is hard to sell, ja?"

"He left a portrait with you before he went away, did he not? I suppose it is for the Wostenholm. He mentioned it to me once or twice, and seemed very hopeful that it would receive recognition."

"Ja, dot is correct. He leaf der portrait mit me about von week ago. Und it is, as you say, for der exhibition next month."

"Can it be seen?" asked Lawrence in a casual tone. "I am rather interested in it, since he has told me of the subject."

"I am sorry, Herr Lawrence. It vould be to you I vould show it if it could be shown. But even I mineself haf not see der painting. It is in mine vault, mit der cover still sealed, as Mr. Lavigne left it. I haf instrooctions not to preak dose seal, but just to enter der canvas in his name. I haf done so alretty. I am sorry, but—you see?"

Herr Von Hulst stopped with a shrug and a gentle smile, deprecating but decisive. He was plainly the sort of man to whom the doing of an act of bad faith or duplicity had never occurred. Certainly he could not be "reached." Lavigne had chosen his agent well.

Lawrence expressed regret and shortly took his leave. As he walked toward the club, turning the matter over in his mind, he could see no possible way in which he could keep Lavigne's picture from the walls of the exhibition, provided it was deemed worthy of being hung by the entrance committee, and he had small doubt of that.

There was only one thing left to do. He must make certain that the committee would not refuse Payne's picture on account of its unfinished condition.

In bare justice to Adrea Varrick her true likeness must be shown at the Wostenholm to give the lie to that monstrosity which Julius Lavigne's twisted mentality and cunning hand had wrought, and which, already practically sure of a place, would be seen by thousands, who would carry away the libelous impression thus forced upon them.

It was a stroke of good fortune, therefore, that on entering the club, Lawrence almost bumped into the chairman of the entrance committee.

"Hello, Van Zandt," he said. "You are just the man I was hoping to catch. I know you are just shriveling up for the want of one of Peters' cocktails. I won't keep you long."

Lawrence led the way to a quiet alcove, and the two sat down. Van Zandt was a rather serious man of forty, and was considered one of the best judges of oils in the country. He was so finicky about justice and fairness in his decisions that he steadily refused, nowadays, to serve on prize-awarding committees, because, as he expressed it, the sorrowful faces of his losing friends haunted him so.

"Van," said Lawrence, as Peters appeared with two frosty glasses on a tray, "do you know Morton Payne?"

"Why," said Van Zandt, "not intimately.

He's been abroad, writing stories and illustrating, or something, hasn't he?"

"Yes, but he's home, now. Has young Warren's place at Fairhaven this summer and he's painted a picture, a portrait in oils."

"Hm," said Van Zandt, sipping his drink, "taken up oils has he? How's he done?"

"Wonderfully. But it isn't finished—that is it isn't in exactly proper shape for the Wostenholm—and it never will be, any more than it is now."

"What's the matter, couldn't he hold the pace, or just tired of it?"

"Neither, Van. He will never paint again, or draw, either. He's gone blind."

"You don't say. Poor chap. How'd it happen? Devilish sorry to hear it. He had a big future ahead of him. Had the right spirit in his things, it seemed to me."

"It's a peculiar case," went on Lawrence. "We don't know what's happened, but he will probably never see again."

"How nearly is the portrait completed?" asked Van Zandt.

"The head is finished and the figure also, except for a little of the gown, which might pass for impressionistic work. The background is, for the most part, just blocked in, with a little color here and there, enough to give it character and make it serve its purpose."

"And he wants to enter it?"

"No. He's given it up, but I want it entered. It's too good to lose. He doesn't know that I am coming to you. He probably wouldn't stand for it. And another thing, I want this to go through, if possible, without anyone's knowing about Mort's blindness. He's keeping it quiet for the present."

"Poor chap," said Van Zandt, his sympathies readily aroused. "Well, send it along. I'll see what the others say. We might stretch a point, if it isn't too rough."

"Thanks, Van," Lawrence said, heartily. "I knew I could rely on you."

"Oh, yes, I'm easy," the other returned. "They all rely on me. Everybody, good and bad, calls me 'Old Reliable.' Get your unfinished wonder in as soon as you can, while we have plenty of time for decisions."

Van Zandt departed, and Lawrence congratulated himself that his request was already as good as granted. If the portrait was in line to be viewed by the committee it was enough. He had no fear that they would refuse it a place.

In anticipation of Van Zandt's consent to have the committee view the canvas, Lawrence had packed it carefully and had brought it to town on his return from the Inlet. It was now in his rooms, and, on the same day, he sent it to the new Wostenholm gallery, which, just out of the hands of the workmen, was a free gift to the trustees by the founder of the first American Salon.

In the course of a week he received a note from Van Zandt, asking him to call at his rooms, and vaguely disturbed by the fact that the portrait was evidently not accepted without possible conditions, and still more by the possibility that it had not been given an entrance at all, he set out for the committee-chairman's chambers.

"Hello, Allan," Van Zandt called as he entered, "sit down. I'll be there in a moment."

When he came, Lawrence was warned by the grave concern in his face that he must not expect too much.

"Well," Van Zandt began, "your unfinished symphony among the roses has kicked up the devil of a row. Starrow and Fordyce were all right. Both were enthusiastic and wanted it in, but old Montague and his satellite, French, couldn't see it at all. Didn't want to establish a precedent, they said, of admitting unfinished work. Heineman was away and Strauss was on the fence, so the best I could do was to propose a compromise. I'm sorry, but it really was the only thing left. We admitted the canvas as an exhibition picture only. It does not enter for the competition."

It was a disappointment, but it was better than being barred out altogether, for now it was assured that the picture would be hung, and that Adrea, personally, would not suffer from Lavigne's treachery.

"By Jove!" Van Zandt was saying, "it's too

bad about Payne. That portrait is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. It's more than a mere exhibition picture. It's a great work, a masterpiece. The public will give it the honors it deserves, even if we cannot."

"Thanks, old man," Lawrence said, gripping the other's hand. "I want you to say that to Mort, some day."

"And I want to," said Van Zandt. "He deserves all the praise that I, or any other man, can give him. There's no hope whatever for his recovery?"

"None at all. There's been some permanent change in the optic nerve. He is blind for life."

"Then America has lost a great painter. But he will have one triumph. That picture will attract more attention than anything we have received yet. There's a funny coincidence about it, though. There's another portrait, entered by old Otto Von Hulst, a dealer down on Thirty-third Street, in the name of Julius Lavigne. The queer thing is, that it was painted from the same model, though how two men could see the same girl so differently I cannot imagine.

"This Lavigne portrait is a stunning piece of work, perfect technic, and brush-work that will make some of them stare; but the treatment of the subject is the remarkable part. He has taken this same girl, the one Payne has made to look like an angel out of heaven, and put a veritable Gorgon in her eyes. Her features are the same

as the other; the likeness unmistakable. But he has painted into it an expression of worldliness and sophistication and contempt for righteousness that makes one shudder.

"I never saw anything like it. The more one looks the more one sees, until it seems as if all knowledge of evil in the whole world, in all its ages, has been gathered in those eyes and expressed in the satire of that smile. You ought to see it, man. It has the Mona Lisa looking like a simple school-girl."

Lawrence felt safest in saying nothing, though he ached to tell Van Zandt the entire story of Lavigne's fiendishness, and his final flight. But he withheld it, for though Payne was now out of the running, so far as the grand prize was concerned, Lawrence deemed it best that the circumstances under which the two pictures had been painted should not be known. It could only be an embarrassment for Payne, and in absence of any actual criminal charge against Lavigne, it might be dangerous. But the chief consideration in Lawrence's mind was that if the story were not known and Lavigne was not pursued, he might eventually return to meet the reckoning that was counted up against him.

Lawrence went directly to his rooms and wrote to Adrea, telling her the entire circumstances of the admission of Payne's picture, but sparing her the prediction that the canvas of Lavigne was likely to attract perhaps even greater attention.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PRIZE-WINNER

THE opening of the Wostenholm was at hand, and this was varnishing day. Lawrence, who had taken upon himself the duty of giving Payne's picture its final dressing, was about to leave the club to perform his part in that important ceremony, when a card was brought to him by Peters.

He took it, a little annoyed at the thought of perhaps some client, who, not finding him at his office, had followed him. It was already on his lips to send a curt message of refusal when his eye caught the name, "John Bradley, M.D."

Instantly the frown disappeared and he told Peters to show the doctor in at once. Bradley, brown from a ten-day voyage over summer seas, came striding across the room, and Lawrence met him with a hearty hand-clasp.

"We docked early this morning," said the doctor, "and as I had a few hours to spare, I thought I would look you up."

"I'm mighty glad you did," Lawrence returned, leading the way to a big, comfortable chair near the window. "You are just in time, too. This is varnishing day at the Wostenholm exhibition,

which opens Monday. I'm going up to give Payne's portrait a rub-down, and I'll take you along."

"I should be delighted," Bradley said, "but where's Payne? That is one of the things a man always does for himself, isn't it?"

"Then you don't know? No, of course, no one knows. I forgot that."

"Know what? What's happened? No, I have heard nothing. Nothing wrong with Payne, I hope."

"Yes," said Lawrence, slowly, "something very, very wrong."

And he told him the entire story of Lavigne's fiendish plot and its results.

Bradley was aghast. Indignation and sorrow were mingled in his tones as he voiced his horror at the refined brutality of Lavigne's act.

"Good God, Lawrence!" he exclaimed. "Do you realize that I, too, am in this? It was I who unwittingly furnished that devil with his weapon! It was my story of the man, blinded through the drinking of wood alcohol, that put it into his head; and more than that, it was the analysis which I dropped that night in the studio that gave him his means of accomplishment."

Greatly moved, Dr. Bradley expressed over and over again his bitter regret, and although Lawrence did his best to make him feel that no possible reproach against him had ever entered the minds of any of them, the physician refused to be absolved.

"If I had only known two weeks ago!" he groaned. "Why, Allan, I *saw* Lavigne in Paris, two days before I sailed. He was in the street, and I was just getting on a 'bus in the Boulevard Haussman. We recognized each other at the same instant. I let the 'bus go, but when I reached the sidewalk, he was gone.

"I thought it queer, and puzzled over it a good deal. I even tried to look him up through the *Herald* directory, but could not find his name. This, then, was the reason. If I had only known, and could have put my hands on him!"

Bradley insisted on knowing, to the smallest detail, everything connected with the discovery of the cause of Payne's blindness.

"I am interested," he told Lawrence, "not only on account of my liking for Payne and my personal sorrow for him, but also from a medical standpoint.

"When I was in Berlin," he went on, as they walked up the Avenue toward the Park entrance, "I went to several clinics and met some of the big men. They recently had a wholesale wood-alcohol poisoning there, you may remember. A lot of paupers, or pensioners of the city, drank some liquor that was adulterated, and some dozens of them died. But there were several who went blind, just as Payne has, and these cases were being studied, with the hope that some means would be found of restoring sight.

"So far," continued Dr. Bradley, "they have

made small progress, but Dr. Siegel, the head of the clinic, and one of the foremost neurologists in Europe, told me that they were by no means discouraged. They had found that certain kinds of stimulation of the optic nerve brought back momentary sensations of light, and he was hopeful that continued experiment would lead to more tangible, and perhaps permanent results."

"Then there is some chance left!" Lawrence ejaculated. "You come like a messenger of hope."

"You mustn't build on it much," the doctor answered, "and until some further progress has been made I would say nothing to Payne, if I were you. It is not definite enough, yet, to make it defensible to raise his expectations. I shall keep in touch with Dr. Siegel, and he will keep me informed of his success, if there is any."

Dr. Bradley also announced his intention of following the Berlin line of study on his own account, using his patient in the next town as a subject. In this way he could keep abreast of Dr. Siegel and his clinic without raising false hopes in Payne.

With even the shadow of a fighting chance for his friend, Lawrence took heart, for he realized that Bradley would leave no possibility uninvestigated that might mitigate the gravity of the injury, to which he himself had been unwittingly such an important accessory.

In the Plaza they hailed a taxicab and drove to the new Wostenholm gallery.

Varnishing day was evidently to be something of a society function; for before the entrance of the white marble building was a line of private broughams, victorias and limousines, steadily discharging their loads of well-dressed people. Lawrence and Bradley left their cab some distance down the line, and walked past the row of vehicles, Lawrence now and then raising his hat to some of their occupants.

Within the building the visitors were widely scattered through the long rooms, passing in little groups from picture to picture, exclaiming over some, hardly noticing others.

The two men walked rapidly through the first room, at the end of which Lawrence stopped and turned to the doctor.

"I didn't dwell, in my account of Lavigne's doings, on the character of his portrait of Adrea Varrick, because I wanted you to see it for yourself. It is in this room."

They went in. The picture had been hung in the best possible light, nearly in the center of the long wall-space, and but little above the level of the eye. The other pictures near-by were of small note, and Lavigne's would certainly be the chief attraction in this part of the salon.

In silence Lawrence led the way. There was no one else in this part of the gallery. As Dr. Bradley came opposite the canvas, Lawrence, at his side, felt his hand twitch, as his fist closed tight. The doctor stopped short and stared

fixedly at the portrait. Lawrence, watching, saw his expression change, slowly, from wonder and incredulity to stern indignation.

At last he spoke.

"It is just as well you didn't attempt to describe this thing, Lawrence. It is indescribable. Never in my life have I seen anything like it. It is a crime, a defenseless, brutal assault, nothing less. And it is still more an outrage to have it hung here in this exhibition, to pander to the morbid sensibilities of the thousands who will see it."

"I tried my best to keep it out," Lawrence said, "but it was no use. Then I tried to have Payne's unfinished portrait hung in this same room, but it was barred out, because it is not in the competition."

As they turned away to find Payne's picture, Lawrence saw a little man with a bushy gray beard rapidly coming toward them.

"Von Hulst, Lavigne's agent," he whispered to Bradley. "Wait a moment."

"Ach, Herr Lawrence, you haf seen der picture? Ja! I haf seen it dis day, also, for der first time, und now I know vy you had sooch an anxiety dot day in mine shop. I do not plame you. It is schrecklich, horrible. If I had known, I might—ach it is too bad, sooch business. Und I haf seen dot young mädchen. She vorked at Duvelle's. Heine, my boy, he remember her, und she vas so sweet, so schön—not like dot. It is verrucht, it is villainy."

Lawrence questioned Von Hulst as to the arrangements that Lavigne had made. It seemed that he had been most careful. He had not even given Von Hulst his address, saying that he would write his further instructions later. And no letter had thus far come.

The old dealer seemed so sincerely regretful of his part in the business that Lawrence felt sorry for him. As they moved away, he called to Von Hulst, and the three together moved to the next room, where Payne's picture had been given place.

It was not hung in so effective a position as the other, and the light was not so good, but it was prominent among the canvases in the room, many of which had been entered, for one reason or another, in the same category, as exhibition pictures only.

Bradley was the first to speak.

"It is wonderful!" he exclaimed. "There could not be a more perfect antithesis to the other. I only know Miss Varrick slightly, of course, but this portrait shows her exactly as I have always thought of her, beautiful of character as well as of feature. How could a man be tempted to pervert and villify so pure a face as that? The comparison makes the crime still more odious."

Von Hulst raptly gazed in silence, his face expressing better than words his feelings and his thoughts.

"Himmel!" he broke out at last. "How can sooch dings be? I vill renounce my dealings mit

dot schurke, dot villain, Lavigne. I vill haf nodding more mit him. He vill write und I vill answer, and dot is der end."

After Lawrence had brushed the portrait over with a light oil to freshen the surface, the trio went back into the other room.

A little group had gathered in front of Lavigne's canvas. There were several women, and they were exclaiming over it in tones of disgusted amazement. The men, all of whom were artistic, were not so censorious, and though they did not fail to grasp the wilful perversion of the subject, they were loud in their praise of the marvelous technic and the remarkable imagination that together had created this masterful work.

Lawrence, unobserved, stood on the outskirts of this little throng and listened to the comments that were made.

"Queer," said one man, "what a twist that chap Lavigne's got. He loves to do this sort of thing. I've known him to do it even on commission work. His portrait of little Gertrude Homans had the same cant, and her father wouldn't take it."

"I don't blame him if it was anything like this," spoke up another, a portait painter himself. "I know this girl. The younger Duvelle has used her for the head in his life class, sometimes. She's as innocent and as sweet as a morning-glory. Pah! This sort of thing is disgusting. They ought not to stand for it."

"I say," chattered young Prescott, who was rising fast in his profession through his work in Paris. "What is it called? It ought to be: 'Eve, 1912—after eating.' Did you know there's a picture of the same girl in the other room by Morton Payne? Well, there is. It ought to be in here, beside this, and labeled, 'Before eating,'—only there's no apple. Pretty fair that! eh, what?"

"Talk about apples of knowledge," called another man. "It would have to be the size of a watermelon to hold half of what's in these eyes. Linder Van Zandt says she's got the Mona Lisa looking like a school-girl. That's so, but it's not strange. The knowledge of the world that lies in Mona's eyes was up to date, perhaps, for Da Vinci's time, but this one's information has been several hundred years more in the gathering. Of course she's got a more knowing look."

Lawrence, wearied and disgusted with the chaffing and the idle talk, turned away and joined Bradley. Von Hulst had gone his way, muttering curses on his own head for ever standing sponsor for Lavigne.

But Lawrence thought he saw something of profit in this, for Lavigne, upon learning that the old dealer would no longer act as his agent, would then be forced to secure another, who might be less conscientious, thus opening the way to possession of the picture, or, he might even be compelled to return at the end of the exhibition, and dispose of it himself.

But for the present there was nothing to do. The exhibition was formally opened on the following Monday, without the presence of its founder, for Mr. Wostenholm was in the West, tied up in the courts as a witness in an important suit.

He had written Lawrence that he could not tell when he would be able to come East again, and he doubted if he should arrive in time to see the exhibition at all.

The following weeks were busy ones for Lawrence. Several cases of the first magnitude were on his docket for trial in the civil courts, and he found little time for visiting the Inlet.

On his flying trips, which Payne and Adrea likened to angels' visits, they were so fleeting and so infrequent, he noted that the girl was doing an almost superhuman work in keeping Payne from falling into the hopeless desuetude of non-employment.

She had learned to run the motor launch with the skill of an engineer, and with Aunt Margaret as chaperon, many of the warm, bright days of early autumn were spent on the waters of the Sound.

The evenings were the worst, Adrea said. With the little excitements and occupations of the day over, Payne was apt to be either restless and despondent, or he made an early excuse to retire, saying that she must want some time to herself after playing nurse all day long.

Lately, however, she had succeeded in arousing his interest in an activity which she had great hopes would continue. She had bought all the monthly magazines at the village stationer's, and had made a practice of reading the fiction aloud to Payne.

Of some of the stories he approved, and praised them and their authors without stint. But by far the majority either made him actively angry, through disagreement with their plots and their characterizations, or they merely bored him.

One day the girl said, "Morton, if you are so dissatisfied with the output of the most of these authors, why don't you come to the rescue of a suffering public yourself?"

The suggestion bore fruit, for the very next day Payne asked her if she thought she could take dictation in shorthand.

In three days he worked out a short story and sent for a typewriter, over whose keyboard Adrea's nimble fingers flew, transcribing the hieroglyphics from her notebook. The script was mailed, and in ten days was accepted, and a check for one hundred dollars was in Payne's pocket-book.

This opened a new avenue of escape from the dull monotony of darkness, and again, with his old-time brilliancy of touch, heightened and made more vivid by the dreams and visions of what, in truth, was the blind man's second sight, Payne set to work in earnest.

In all, three stories had been written, two of

which had found friendly editors, while the third had been returned once, and was now on its second journey. The plot of a novel also was taking form in Payne's mind, and with Adrea's aid, and her whole interest at his disposal, was being steadily worked out as to detail.

On his last visit, Lawrence quickly saw that, as matters stood, his presence was a disturbing factor, and after staying the night, he motored his lonely way back to town.

The comment of the newspaper critics upon the two portraits of Adrea had been remarkably uniform. Almost without exception they exclaimed, with many adjectives, over the canvas of Lavigne, extolling its marvels of artistry, and proclaiming it a masterpiece of the first rank.

There were some, however, who went a little deeper than perfection of drawing and technic, and pointed a comparison between the two canvases, drawing the correct conclusion that Lavigne's work was one of the imagination alone, and sincerity and truth were not among its virtues.

But no voice was raised loudly against what he had done. There was no personal interest in Adrea Varrick.

Of Payne's work, the journals had but little to say. Well known as an illustrator and as a writer of ability, his departure into the field of portraiture attracted practically no attention, except from the discerning few, whose natural distaste for academic controversy led them to

admire in silence or to quietly discuss in their own circle the simple "portrait of a young girl among the roses," which, for them, was one of the chief attractions of the Wostenholm.

Lawrence often visited the gallery, and he was touched to find that more often than not, Von Hulst, the little dealer of Thirty-third Street, was there, as if on guard, lest visitors who came to see the great Lavigne portrait should leave the gallery without seeing Adrea Varrick as she was painted by the brush of truth.

One by one, group by group he led them to the next room, and there showed them Payne's canvas, asking, in his simple way, whether it was more worthy to create a wonder in artistry than to portray the face of a young girl in its true guise of innocence and purity.

Von Hulst, Lawrence learned, frequently arrived as soon as the doors were opened, and remained, as if on duty, throughout the day. Once he spoke to the old man of his persistent presence.

"Ach!" the old art-lover exclaimed. "What can I do more than dis? I feel like almost a criminal, in dot I stand as sponsor to dot dretful painting. I watch der peoples und hear vot dey say, und how dey admire, even ven dey shudder. Und den I lead dem to dot odder von, und dey tank me und go away vidoudt looking some more at dot—dot teufelsgemälde! I feel so guilty! I do vot I can for dot liddel mädchen."

Touched by the gentleness of the old man,

Lawrence wrung his hand and thanked him, and always, after that, when they met at the gallery, or when Lawrence dropped in at his little shop, as he sometimes did in the evenings, they talked as close friends do, of Payne and Adrea and then of Lavigne and his wickedness. It was singularly enough a kind of comfort to Lawrence.

At last the day approached for the judgment and the awarding of the grand prize. Two days before the time of the announcement Lawrence received a telegram from Mr. Wostenholm, saying that he should be in New York on the day after the award, and that he wished Lawrence to go to the gallery with him. He would be in town for only two days, he said.

For some time there had been whispered about, rumors of a disagreement among the judges over the final decision. The choice, so report had it, was narrowed down to three, and there had been some warm arguments over the merits and faults of this trio of canvases. But nothing had leaked out as to the identity of the pictures.

Lawrence, who was as near to the inside source of information as any one, could not get even a hint of the actual dispute that had hung the committee. Van Zandt, and several other men of sound ideas, had expressed the opinion, privately, that, for real merit and pure artistic worth, not a picture in the gallery could hold a candle to Payne's. But of course, since the portrait was out of the running, this was but cold comfort.

Two of the three canvases, Lawrence could easily guess at. One was a marine and the other a *genre* picture of an after-theater supper-party in one of the great lobster palaces of Broadway, a typical scene of every-day life, which had been one of the most popular works of the exhibition.

And the third! He could also guess at that. But he could not bring himself to believe that the man who had wantonly caused such suffering could, by his black arts, win the chief honor among American painters.

So he waited, impatiently, with fears and misgivings sinking deeper and deeper down into his heart.

Lawrence was up early on that day, and sent his servant to buy copies of the morning papers. He thought he was prepared, but he was not, and it was almost with a physical shock that he read the lines:

"The grand prize of the first American Salon, the Wostenholm exhibition, amounting to $10,000 in cash, was last night awarded by the Judging Committee to Julius Lavigne, whose 'Portrait of a Young Woman' has been one of the chief points of interest ever since the opening day.

"The unfinished portrait by Morton Payne from the same model, which has been considered by many connoisseurs to be the best work shown, but which was not entered by the prize competition on account of its unfinished condition, was awarded a special gold medal, and given first honorable mention."

CHAPTER XXVI

"TELL ME HER NAME!"

AT nine o'clock Lawrence was in his office, nervously smoking a cigar and trying to compose a letter to Adrea, telling her of the award. It would be better to go to the Inlet, he thought, and tell her personally, but he could not. So he sat at his desk, his thoughts full of bitterness and resentment at this judgment of a group of men, presumably authorities on art, who could go so far astray as to mistake a cheap artistry for the truth.

He realized that ever since he had first seen Lavigne's picture he had been afraid of this very thing, and that his own prejudice had refused to allow him to acknowledge it. That the sweet face of Adrea Varrick was now to be known on two continents in the hideous guise in which Julius Lavigne had masked it, was unbearable.

There was little doubt, of course, that the picture would be sold, and at a high figure. It would be seen, not only in its owner's collection, but in many of the principal galleries of America and possibly Europe. And he was powerless to prevent it, without laying bare the entire circumstance of the portrait's inception and the

heinous means by which its painter had accomplished the ruin of Payne, his justly-feared rival.

But he did not wish to publish the story abroad. As yet, Payne was entirely ignorant of the cause of his blindness, and any sudden shock, such as the knowledge of it, might result in great additional harm. Both Dr. Thomas and Dr. Bradley had given warning against it.

Again, if the matter became public, the chance of finally laying the hand of the law upon Lavigne might be lost, and though his reputation would be gone, the ill-gotten gains from the sale of the picture, in addition to the ten thousand dollars prize money, would be his, and he could afford to laugh at a charge to which he could point as being based on misfortune and professional jealousy.

A drastic punishment for Lavigne, outside the law's pale, was Lawrence's great desire, and while he sat, trying to think out some plan by which he could reach him, quietly, surely and adequately, the door opened, and a clerk appeared with a card.

Immediately behind him, not waiting to be announced, loomed the great figure of Charles J. Wostenholm.

"Howdy, Allan," was his greeting, as he waved the clerk outside and carefully shut the door. "I'm on a rush trip this time, and no mistake. Got to see two men, corral a clean profit of two hundred thousand on the Shamingo power plants, and get away West again to-night."

He grasped Lawrence's hand in his enormous fist, and seated himself in the biggest chair in the room. He held a morning paper in his hand, open at the account of the committee's award. As he looked at him, Lawrence almost started as he recalled the day he had related to Wostenholm the facts connected with the painting of Lavigne's picture.

What, Lawrence wondered, would Wostenholm say when he was told that the winner of the first grand prize offered through his own generosity, was the very man he was helping to track down? Moreover, Wostenholm had met Payne, and had liked him well. That he should be the victim of this vile treachery would add fuel to the fire of his anger.

For a moment Lawrence doubted that he had done right in telling the story and accepting the aid of the founder of the exhibition, for he saw the embarrassments to which it might lead, should the matter ever become known.

But the thought came to him, as it had come before, that if Lavigne could be led into a trap and confronted with the evidence of his guilt, there would be no need of publicity in meting out to him his just punishment.

He knew Wostenholm well enough to assure himself that he would treat the matter fairly, even though he might be indignant, when he learned how and by whom the prize had been won. He would see that, even had he known

the facts Allan had withheld, he could not have interfered without being accused of holding a club over the heads of his trustees, and thus incurring public criticism, which, in a measure, would have been justified.

On the instant, Lawrence wisely decided to say nothing to identify Lavigne with the artist for whom he was searching, until after Wostenholm had seen both pictures. The two portraits of Adrea Varrick were capable of telling the story far more impressively than any words of his.

"Well," said Wostenholm, tapping his newspaper with a big forefinger, "I see they've named the winner, and that the exhibition is called one of the biggest things in the history of American art. That's what I meant it to be. I'm satisfied."

"Satisfied without even having seen it?" Lawrence asked, with a dissembling grin.

"No, by George. I must see it. I must see it to-day, too, even if I haven't got a minute. Have you those papers ready? I'll sign them, and then we'll look at the pictures. I should like to give them a week, but I can spare just one hour."

He said it almost wistfully, pulling out a big, old-fashioned watch as he spoke.

"I have to meet the Shamingo man at ten-thirty. Can you go with me now?"

Lawrence took a bundle of documents from his office safe.

"Here they are," he said. "Sit down here,

Mr. Wostenholm. I'll have Washburn in to witness for you. It won't take five minutes, and then we're off."

"What do you think of the award, son?" asked Wostenholm, as they drove rapidly uptown. "You're as good a judge as any. Was it a fair decision?"

"I'd rather not give you an opinion just yet," said Lawrence. "Wait until you've seen the picture."

"Hm," grunted Wostenholm. "You don't need to say anything more. I can see what you think. You don't agree."

Lawrence laughed, shortly. There was a bitter ring in it that made Wostenholm look at him; but he said nothing and the talk turned to other subjects.

It was a full hour before the regular opening time of the gallery, and no one but the employees was in the building. Its donor was too well known not to be immediately recognized, and as they entered, past the obsequious and awestruck doorkeeper.

"I'd like to see 'em all, you know," said Wostenholm, standing in the middle of the great entrance hall and gazing about at the magnificence his money had created. "I'd like nothing better than to spend the day right here, but I can't. So I want you to take me round. Show me the best. I'll shut my eyes and you can lead me past the bad and the mediocre."

Lawrence purposely began at the left, and so worked his way completely around the four long corridors before arriving at the room where Lavigne's picture was hung.

It was hard, at times, to keep Wostenholm moving, so eager was he to see the work that his generosity had inspired. But at last they worked their way through, and came to the door of the room in which hung Payne's portrait of Adrea. It was no part of Lawrence's plan that he should see this first, so, with the suggestion that time was getting short, he hurried him through to view the prize picture.

"On the right wall in the center," he directed as they entered. "Stand directly in front, for the best light."

He stood a little back and watched Wostenholm. The big man showed a strange eagerness as he approached the picture. Then Lawrence saw him suddenly stop short, with a sort of exclamation under his breath. He had seen many people affected by the portrait, but none so quickly, for at first glance there was nothing greatly out of the ordinary about the face. It was only after a moment's inspection that its strange, gripping sensuality could be seen and felt.

Prompted by an impulse that he hardly realized, he moved nearer to Wostenholm, and he perceived that the great frame was stiffened as if made of oak, the hands half-outstretched as if warding off some evil thing. Slowly Wostenholm turned,

and Lawrence saw that his face was chalk-white and covered with great drops of sweat.

Startled, he hurried to his side.

"What is it, Mr. Wostenholm? Are you ill?"

Wostenholm did not reply. He caught at Lawrence's arm with one hand, as he drew the other across his eyes.

"God!" he said.

Lawrence, amazed, led him to a seat, and the big man sank down, inert and nerveless, and thoroughly alarmed he was about to call one of the attendants to telephone for a physician, when Wostenholm spoke.

"No," he said, huskily. "Call no one. I—I'm not ill. Come here, Allan. Tell—me—who that—is."

As he spoke, he pointed at the portrait with a hand that trembled, as it measured off his words.

"Tell me! Who sat for that picture? Do you know? You must find out. I—I must know at once."

His hand dropped limply, and he leaned back on the cushioned seat, his great shaggy head sunk on his chest, his eyes still fixed on the canvas.

And now it was Lawrence's turn to start and stare, not at the portrait, the poor soul-caricature of Adrea Varrick, but at the man, who, with pleading in the voice he had never heard except with the ring of command in its tones, had asked the name of Lavigne's model.

What was the meaning of it? What did this man of millions know of Adrea Varrick?

"For God's sake, can't you speak?" urged the man on the seat.

Lawrence strove to control his own voice as he answered.

"Yes, Mr. Wostenholm, I know the girl very well. She is——"

"Wait! Is she—in the name of Heaven, Allan, is she what *that*—says she is? Tell me that, before you name her!"

"Mr. Wostenholm, I know her better, I think, than I know any other woman. She is the purest, sweetest, truest girl that walks the earth. That portrait is a lie, an infamous, cold-blooded lie, an insult to true womanhood, a libel on all the virtue in the world. This is the picture of which I told you. Julius Lavigne is its painter, and his blind victim is Morton Payne."

Wostenholm's shaking hand stiffened, the color crept slowly back into his white face, his big shoulders straightened, and he stood up.

Lawrence marveled at the change.

"And *her name? Her name,* man! You haven't told me that."

"Her name is Adrea Varrick."

"Adrea Varrick! Adrea Varrick! Great God! I didn't have to ask. I knew it would be that. And she's good, you say? Not like that—not the way this devil has painted her? Good, you say?"

"Yes, Mr. Wostenholm. She is good. She is

the best. Shall I prove it to you? Here in this next room is the portrait Payne painted of her. He has painted the truth. Shall I show it to you?"

"Yes," whispered Wostenholm. "I want to see it. Adrea! Adrea Varrick!"

Lawrence led him down the long gallery into the adjoining apartment, and as he walked, slowly, leaning on the younger man's arm, he whispered the name over and over to himself: "Adrea Varrick, Adrea Varrick."

When they came opposite Payne's picture, Lawrence stopped and pointed.

"There she is, Mr. Wostenholm. This is the *truth*."

Wostenholm looked up, and saw. He needed no second glance to assure him that he was looking straight into the eyes of innocence.

Almost a cry burst from him, as he started forward to the iron rail that kept the paintings from harm. As he moved, he reached deep into an inner pocket and Lawrence saw him fumbling with a black leather case. He noticed that he was trying to open it, but could not, and as he reached his side he saw that the older man's eyes were full of tears.

"Here, son," he said, "open it for me. I—I'm an old fool, I reckon."

Lawrence pressed a spring, and the leather covers flew apart. There, embedded in a velvet frame lay a miniature, painted on ivory. And the face that looked up at him was the face of Adrea Varrick.

He could not repress a start as he looked his inquiry at Wostenholm.

"Who is she?" he asked in a queer, strained voice that was not above a whisper.

"She was my wife, Allan," said the big man, in a tone of such gentleness and such reverence that Lawrence hardly recognized it.

"Your wife!" he cried, as the meaning broke in upon him. "And Adrea Varrick?"

He pointed toward the portrait on the wall.

"I believe," Wostenholm said, softly, "I believe she is her daughter, and mine."

In a flash Lawrence recalled the story that Adrea had told long ago, in the early days of their acquaintance; of her mother and her unknown father, the father whose name she had never been told.

He remembered, too, the packet, which she had said was waiting for her until the time came when some crisis in her life should demand that she should know her father's identity. Could it be? It must be. Charles J. Wostenholm was that man.

The two looked at each other, steadily, for a long moment, not speaking, each trying to read the other's thoughts.

Wostenholm motioned toward a seat.

"She has told you something?" he asked, uncertainly.

"Yes," Lawrence said. "Or rather, she said that she knew nothing of you to tell. But she

told of her mother, and how her father, forgive me if I use her words, made it impossible for them to remain together. She did not tell me what the trouble was, because she does not know."

"And her mother?" barely breathed Wostenholm, laying his great hand on the other's arm. "Is her mother—living?"

"No," Lawrence answered, gently. "She died when Adrea was a little child. She scarcely remembers her at all."

Wostenholm groaned, and dropped his head into his hands.

"I knew," he said. "I have sought for her so long."

"Adrea has always lived with her aunt, Mrs. Margaret Butler. She is with her now," Lawrence told him.

"You say," asked Wostenholm after a moment's silence, "that the girl does not know why her mother left her father?"

"No," replied Lawrence, his heart going out in sympathy for the other in his pain. "She knows nothing. She only has been told that there was a bitter misunderstanding of some sort, and that her mother left her father before she was born.

"Her mother, before she died, made her aunt promise never to reveal her married name to Adrea, but she left a sealed packet, containing it, with a trust company in New York. It was to be given to Adrea upon her aunt's death, or, it might be opened sooner, in case of great need to

know the facts concerning the marriage of her parents and her own birth."

The older man was listening quietly now, and seemed at last to have pulled himself together. He lifted his head and faced Lawrence.

"Allan," he said, laying his hand on the younger man's shoulder, "some time I may tell you the story of that quarrel. It was nothing but a quarrel, a misunderstanding. I could not explain to her without jeopardizing the life of a friend. She would not wait for the time when I could explain, and she left me. I could not blame her. I never blamed her. I loved her then, as I have ever since. And I sought for her, and grieved for her, but she had hidden herself away from me, and I could not find her.

"This," he looked again at the sweet face in the golden frame. "This is the first knowledge I have ever had, that I had a child. She is the image of my Adrea. You have seen her, there, in the miniature. Do you wonder at my emotion when I saw this face in that other portrait?"

Wostenholm rose and walked across into the long room to where Lavigne's canvas hung, shameless and lewd.

"The man who painted that infamous thing!" he cried. "I want to meet that man."

And, then, in the presence of the work that had changed the very course of the lives of those with whom it was concerned, Lawrence told this strong old man the full story of it—how Lavigne

had painted and watched, and watched and painted until, at last, the light went out for Morton Payne, and he had won.

Wostenholm listened to the end, Lawrence explaining fully his reasons for desiring to keep the matter from the public, and for wishing to punish Lavigne, if it were possible, by some means other than by court of law.

"What is it that would hurt him most?" Wostenholm inquired.

"Poverty," was Lawrence's laconic answer.

"Then," swore Wostenholm, with a great oath, "that shall come to him. We'll strip him to the hide, and cast him out naked, body and soul."

As he spoke, there was the sound of a small commotion in the entrance hall.

"But it is important, I tell you. I must see Herr Lawrence at vonce."

Lawrence recognized the gutturals of Von Hulst, and presently he saw the old picture dealer coming excitedly toward them.

"Herr Lawrence, Herr Lawrence," the old man was saying as he came down the gallery, with one eye over his shoulder to make sure he was not again in danger of ejection.

"What is it, Von Hulst?"

Von Hulst stopped at seeing Wostenholm, and recognizing him as the donor of the foundation, bowed deeply and apologized.

"I vas yust vishing to speak mit Herr Lawrence," he said. "You vill please egscuse."

Lawrence, wondering, followed the old man to the other end of the gallery.

"Herr! Herr!" he exclaimed, as they reached a safe distance. "He iss here, here in New York! Lavigne, Julius Lavigne iss here! He vill be at mine place in an hour, to receive der check from der committee!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SENTENCE

IN less than half an hour, Lawrence, Wostenholm and Von Hulst were in Thirty-third Street. The little art dealer led them to his back room, in which he lived, and from which, through a partly drawn curtain, they could see the length of the shop. Von Hulst then dismissed Heinie, who went away, awed and wonderstruck by the presence in that humble place of the great Charles J. Wostenholm.

Von Hulst, outwardly calm, but inwardly palpitating with excitement, busied himself about the front of the store, while the other two sat and waited. They did not talk much. Their plan of action had been roughly laid out on the way down town, but the settled grimness on the face of each told plainer than any words that their minds were clear and fixed as to one thing—Lavigne's punishment.

The minutes dragged by. More than once, Lawrence wished that they had not come so openly. Von Hulst had told them that Lavigne had revealed his presence in the city in a telephone message. But he did not know where it was from, and Lawrence feared that he might

have been near-by, possibly watching the shop.

Lavigne could not have been long on this side of the water, Lawrence considered, since Dr. Bradley had seen him in Paris only a few days before he had sailed himself. The man must have come across to be on hand when the prize was awarded. How cock-sure he had been, and how many times, Lawrence reflected, was just such confidence the forerunner of a fall.

Wostenholm sat bolt-upright in the old split-bottomed chair that Von Hulst had placed for him. His arms were folded, and beneath his big, bushy beard his square chin jutted out ominously. He was looking for the man who had so wantonly and publicly placed a brand of shame upon the child whom he had never seen.

But the pleasure of passing sentence upon this man was not to be his. Lawrence had pointed out that it would not do for the donor of the Wostenholm to appear in this affair, no matter how great and equitable might be its justice.

As Lawrence was about to voice his misgivings of Lavigne's wariness, the little bell, connected with the front door of the shop, gave a sharp tinkle. They heard the door slam shut and saw Von Hulst go forward.

"Ah! Herr Lavigne!" they heard him say. "I am surprised to see you so soon. It is congratulations for you, eh? Der grand prize! Ja! Ten tausend dollars. It is a great sum, nicht wahr?"

"You have received the check?" asked Lavigne, hurriedly. "If so, let me have it at once, please. I am in something of a rush, as I am only in town for the day. We can arrange later about the sale of the picture. You have had some offers?"

"Ach," shrugged Von Hulst. "Offers! Von does not sell a vinning prize picture to der first comer. Vait! You shall see vot it vill pring."

"Yes, yes, I know. No doubt it will be better to wait," said Lavigne, glancing about the shop. "Just hand me the check, will you? I have a taxi outside that is eating into it already."

"Ja," said the old dealer. "Der check you shall have. Yust step into mine liddle office, Herr Lavigne."

The two walked toward the back of the shop and Lawrence, watching, drew back behind the curtain. He saw them enter the little private room, and heard Von Hulst say:

"Sit down, Herr Lavigne. I will get der check from der safe in mine room."

In another instant Von Hulst stepped through the doorway, his eyes glowing, his old body trembling with excitement.

"Go! He iss dere, vaiting for you."

Lawrence grimly stepped through the curtains.

Lavigne, too nervous to sit, was pacing back and forth in the small office, his hands twisting and untwisting behind him. When his back was turned, Lawrence walked through the open door, and closed it behind him.

Lavigne swung around.

"You!" he gasped.

In an instant the olive hue of his swarthy face changed to a greenish tinge. His strange, unequal eyes widened in a stare of sickly fright.

"You!" he whispered again.

Lawrence, narrowly watching his every move, set his back squarely against the door, and, folding his arms, looked at him.

"Yes, it is I, Lavigne. What is the matter? One would think that you are surprised, and not altogether glad to see me."

Lavigne winced. "Is this a trap? Did that old devil, Von Hulst, tell you I was coming here?"

"A trap, Lavigne? Pray what for?" Lawrence asked, with mockingly uplifted eyebrows.

Lavigne saw he had made a poor start.

"What do you want with me?" he asked, sullenly, leaning against the high desk, as if his knees were giving way under him

There was nothing to be gained by playing with the man, and Lawrence quickly dropped his bantering tone and stepped toward him.

"Sit down, Lavigne," he said, pushing forward a chair.

Lavigne dropped into it, while Lawrence stood between him and the door, a grim figure of calm, inexorable vengeance.

"There's no need of our wasting words, or time, Lavigne. You know what I want you for, and why I have only to speak one word to Von Hulst

to bring the officer who is waiting across the street."

Lavigne's face went a shade paler, and he squirmed in his chair.

"I—I don't know what you're talking about, Lawrence," he said weakly.

"Don't try to bluff me, Lavigne," said Lawrence, impatiently. "I won't stand for it. I've got the goods on you. You ought to have known enough to wear gloves on the kind of a job where you have to handle glass and calendered paper. And it's safer not to choose a rainy night, and not to wear an oilskin slicker. Look here."

Lawrence took out his pocketbook and showed Lavigne the prescription-blank with Bradley's name at the top. In one corner was the plain, unmistakable mark of a thumb-print.

"The gum from the outside of an oil-coat makes a fine medium for this sort of thing, doesn't it?" asked Lawrence,poking the paper under the other's nose, where he could see his cuticle-signature without effort.

Quick as the claw of a cat, Lavigne's hand shot up and snatched at it. But the paper was gone, and the hand that held it was safely behind Lawrence's back, while the other grasped his wrist in a grip that made him wince.

"Don't try it, Lavigne. Let's not have any dramatics, if you please. Here's another little document that may prove interesting to you. A man naturally likes to know the result of his

experiments, especially in the chemistry line."

The second paper he showed to the man in the chair was the analysis of the gin that was left in the bottom of Payne's jug. It corresponded almost exactly to that on the prescription-blank.

Lavigne stared at it, saying nothing. He was plainly perplexed as well as frightened.

"That was another thing you didn't count on," went on Lawrence, folding up both papers and tucking them safely away. "You figured there wouldn't be any left to analyze, but there was, you see."

Lavigne sat silent, biting his lips and locking and unlocking his hands.

"If anything else is needed to convince you that we know all about it," said Lawrence, slowly, opening the pocketbook once more, why——"

"Oh, for God's sake, Lawrence! Don't. I give in. I did it. What are you going to do with me?"

His abjectness was disgusting, and the other looked down upon the cringing, broken figure with contempt and loathing.

"We might indict for mayhem, I suppose, but intent to murder could be proved as easily," he said, thoughtfully. "In any case it means a long term, Lavigne."

Lavigne groaned and hid his face.

Lawrence ceased talking for effect.

"Lavigne," he said, in crisp, business-like tones.

"Quit sniveling there, and listen to me. You deserve all the court could give you. I won't try to flay you with the language that is rising in me. You are so much of a coward that it would be all lost. There isn't one good fight in you."

Lavigne caught at a straw of hope in the words, and looked up.

"There are some reasons," Lawrence continued, slowly, "why we do not care to bring this business into court at this time. They are personal reasons, concerning Payne, and Miss Varrick, and another—not myself. We have decided to let you go, to let you live out your miserable life as you will."

Lavigne started to his feet, his face eager.

"Sit down," said Lawrence, sternly. "Wait until I am through. Your freedom will rest upon conditions."

"I will agree! I'll agree to anything, Lawrence, anything you say."

"Of course you will," Lawrence said, dryly. "The first is that you sign a confession, stating that you admit the blinding of Morton Payne, and including your motive for the act."

Lavigne writhed, but said nothing.

"The second," Lawrence went on, "is that you leave the country."

Lavigne nodded. He would be only too glad to get away.

"The third is that you surrender your painting to me."

Lavigne started. He had great expectations from the sale of his prize picture.

"The fourth condition," Lawrence concluded, "is the last, and you shall hear it when you have complied with the first and third.

He took a pen from the desk, and wrote out a confession on a sheet of paper. Lavigne heard it in silence. Lawrence stepped to the door and called Von Hulst.

When the little man came in, Lawrence read what he had written, and silently passed the pen to Lavigne. The man hesitated.

"This will only be used in case you should break the second part of the agreement, and return from abroad," said Lawrence.

"No," he went on, as he saw a question forming on the other's lips. "You have no guarantee except my word."

With a hand that was wet with the sweat of agony, Lavigne took the pen and wrote his name.

Von Hulst added his signature as a witness, and Lawrence at once drew up a bill of sale for the picture. As he passed it to Lavigne, he saw the other tighten his lips and repress a groan. The price named was "one dollar and other valuable considerations." But he signed, and the paper was witnessed by the dealer.

"That is all, Von Hulst," said Lawrence. "We shall be through in a moment."

The old man went out and closed the door. Lawrence turned squarely to Lavigne.

"Now," he said, "you shall hear the fourth and last condition."

From the pocketbook that he still held, he took a paper. Lavigne's queer eyes lighted up with their greenish glow as he saw it. It was the Wostenholm trustees' check for ten thousand dollars, made out to Julius Lavigne.

"No doubt it has seemed to you," Lawrence said deliberately, as he smoothed out the strip of paper between his fingers and laid it on the desk under his hand, "that you are getting off rather well. As yet, there has been nothing in the way of reparation. The other conditions were easy. This one may be harder. But I will call your attention to the fact that the gates of Sing Sing are strong, and that they do not open outward so readily as they open in. Twenty years, too, is a long time."

He paused a moment, watching the man before him. At every word he saw him cringe.

"I require, Lavigne," he said, quietly, "that you endorse this check to the order of Adrea Varrick."

"Oh, good God!" cried Lavigne, sinking into the chair and lifting his hands to Lawrence, "you wouldn't rob me of that! You wouldn't strip me bare of everything! I've got to live. I've got to live, somewhere."

"Do you consider, then," Lawrence blazed, in sudden anger, "that this money belongs to you? That you have earned it as a reward of merit, you

who stooped to the most cowardly and despicable villainy, who blinded the man who had always stood your friend, that you might win it? Endorse that check, Lavigne."

His voice grew low and stern as he spoke the final words. He took out his watch.

"You have just thirty seconds to make up your mind."

Ten went by; fifteen. The little hand ticked onward toward the half minute mark.

"Twenty-five," warned Lawrence.

Lavigne uttered a cry and seized the pen.

Lawrence read the endorsement approvingly.

"That's right, Lavigne," he said. "I thought I hadn't made a mistake. Now, here is transportation to Havre on a steamer that sails at ten to-morrow. You will take it, and you will also take your last look at the Statue of Liberty as you sail down the harbor. Don't come back, Lavigne. I shall be waiting."

And Lawrence raised the confession he held, and tapped it with his finger.

"You can go, now," he said. "There will be someone to see you off. You won't know him, but he will be there, just the same."

He held the door open and Lavigne slunk out, staggering like a man who has passed through a great ordeal, and emerged, beaten, crushed, all but annihilated.

Lawrence watched until the street door closed, and as the broken figure shambled down the street,

he nodded approvingly as he saw a man emerge from a doorway opposite, and fall into Lavigne's pace a dozen yards or so behind.

At the sound of a heavy step, Lawrence turned to see Wostenholm's huge figure emerging from the back room.

"Well done, Allan," exclaimed the big man. "You ought to be a district attorney."

"It was too easy," was the reply. "He deserved more of a penalty than ten thousand dollars fine. Besides, I doubt that Adrea will accept the money."

Wostenholm noticed that Von Hulst, as if fearful of intruding upon their conversation, was hovering in the front of the shop. He called to him.

"Mr. Von Hulst," he said, extending his great hand to the little man, "we owe you a great deal for your part in this affair of justice. You have acted well."

Von Hulst stammered in broken German, as he protested in much embarrassment.

"Mr. Lawrence has told me," Wostenholm went on, "something of you and your kindly interest in seeing that the people who visited the gallery were put straight about the two pictures. I want to thank you for that interest. He has also told me that you have a boy, who is a painter, and who is ambitious. He wants to study in Europe. Well, I am going to make that possible."

He took out a check book and wrote. Von

Hulst's old limbs fairly shook as he took the bit of paper the great man handed him. It was drawn to his order for one thousand dollars.

Von Hulst was speechless. Wostenholm laughed and patted him gently on the shoulder.

"Take it, my friend. Send your boy where he wants to go. If more is needed tell me so. Give him the best. I want him to give you a chance to be proud of him."

Tears overflowed from the old eyes, and in the absence of the words which refused to come, he pressed, fervently, the hand of his benefactor.

Wostenholm looked at Lawrence across the bowed and grizzled head.

"Come, Allan," he said, "take me to my girl. I am hungry, hungry for her."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GRAND PRIZE

THE daily papers reached Fairhaven Inlet by the first morning train and were carried to the Point by the butcher's boy.

Aware that the awarding of the prize was to have taken place on the day before, Adrea was waiting on the porch when the bundle arrived. With a beating heart she scanned the pages, turning them hurriedly, in search of the headline that should reveal the identity of the winner.

Suddenly she stopped. There, three columns wide, a half-tone cut stared out at her. It was the Lavigne portrait.

With a groan she closed her eyes before she could summon the courage to look again. Then she perceived that the reproduction was mercifully bad. The expression of the face was almost entirely submerged in the inky blur, and she saw that only one who had known the original would be able to recognize the features. Underneath, there was another cut, which had escaped her notice. It was of Payne's picture.

She glanced at the headlines, announcing Lavigne as the winner of the grand prize and Payne as the recipient of the special-honor medal.

The art critic of the paper had dealt fairly with the award. He spoke of the two paintings and the apparent mystery that lay between them, speculating vainly on the point of view of the two artists. But he closed by identifying the model as one of the former attendants at Duvelle's, not mentioning her name, but avowing, from personal knowledge and remembrance of her, that there could be no doubt as to which portrait was true, and which the product of an erratic imagination.

Adrea read the article through, thankful for the writer's quiet gentlemanliness and his evident appreciation of her own position. It almost seemed as if he must have known something of the story of the portraits, so clearly had he grasped the essentials. There was no effort to open a controversy on the merit of the two works.

And now Adrea faced a new problem. How would Payne bear the news that Lavigne had won? Ever since he had been told, in response to his repeated queries, that the portrait had been entered and hung, he had shown uneasiness. At first, he had sharply criticized the entrance committee for taking the canvas at all, and it was only when Adrea, with the fair-mindedness that ever characterized her, had pointed out that the committee, being without personal interest in the matter, had, no doubt, accepted the canvas purely on its merits as a work of art, that his resentment was quieted.

She had deemed it wiser to tell him of the hanging of his own picture also, after its acceptance for exhibition had rendered secrecy no longer necessary. At first he had inclined to disapproval, but when Lawrence, on one of his visits, had pointed out the intention to do justice to Adrea, Payne had cursed his own self-centered stupidity in not perceiving this side of the matter first.

Of late, however, he had made almost no reference to the exhibition in any way. His interest seemed to be lessening as he became more accustomed to the limitations of his misfortune. He had taken up his literary work with great earnestness, and as his facility in dictation grew, Adrea had found that she was sometimes taxed to keep her typed script up to date with her shorthand notes.

As she sat wondering how he would receive the news of Lavigne's success, she heard his slow step upon the stairs. She rose and went in to him, laying her hand on his arm as he reached the lowest step.

It had been her custom, each morning, to read to him the parts of the paper in which he would be interested, and this, with his comments on the people in the day's news, whom he knew, either personally or by reputation, had been one of the bright spots in the daily round for both. But this morning she would have gladly shunned the task.

Although the knowledge of Lavigne's triumph might be tempered by the honor paid to Payne's own work, she knew that the old bitterness would come back, and that the sense of his loss would return to him tenfold. But she knew that he must be told, and though it seemed hard that it was she who must be the instrument of pain, she resolutely set herself to perform her task, trusting to the love in her own heart to heal the wound she might inflict.

"Have the papers come, Adrea?" he asked, as he heard the rustle of the sheet she held.

"Yes, Morton, the boy drove up just now. Shall we go into the garden? The air is so fresh this morning it is a sin not to be out in it."

He noticed her tactful avoidance of an appeal to his visual sense in expressing the fineness of the day, and silently thanked her, even though he winced under it, as, in his sensitiveness, he caught the underlying thought of pity.

"Yes, indeed," he answered. "The sun is bright, isn't it, and the sky cloudless? I know by the way the birds are singing, out there on the lawn."

There was a smile on his face as he spoke, and when the girl looked up at him, standing there, erect, his head up, with none of the questing timidity of the blind in his expression or bearing, she was touched, suddenly and deeply, by his patience, his cheerfulness and his courage. Indeed, there had never been a moment when he had not shown that he was a man.

Together, they walked down the graveled path and across the grass, Adrea walking near, guiding him by her presence alone, by voice and movement, and the light brushing of her skirts against him. Soon they came to the nook in the garden, with its stone columns covered with climbing rose vines. The roses were gone now; but some of their fragrance seemed to cling to the spot still, in a redolence of summer memories.

They sat down on the old stone bench, and there, quietly, the whispers of her heart upon every word, she told him of Lavigne's prize-winning.

And Payne by his quiet, almost too quiet, reception of the news, surprised her with his calmness.

"I have been afraid of it," he told her. "I have never seen the canvas, of course, but I know the tremendous effect that it had upon you, and it is not surprising that others were struck by it. There must have been something powerful, something gripping in its very devilishness that has made it the talk of artists and laymen alike."

But as he went on, his voice grew bitter and hard: "Now, I suppose, some new-made millionaire will buy it and show it in a new, jim-crack palace, still odorous with paint and varnish, much as one exhibits a prize cow, or a sheep with two heads. The men, and the women too, will crowd about and make comments, the same comments they would make at a salacious play or a meretricious peep-show. It is horrible."

Adrea sat silent, wondering herself what would become of the portrait.

"And so they gave me a medal and first honors," Payne mused. "Adrea, we should have been more diligent. I might have finished that picture before the darkness came. Then I should have been spared the ignominy of accepting favors that are urged by pity.

"Think of it!" he exclaimed. "One week, and it would have been finished!"

"Yes, Morton," Adrea said, "the week that you lacked was the one I took from you—the week of the fire, when you sat with your arms bandaged in cotton because of a girl's thoughtless wish to save a poor little violin."

"Don't, Adrea," he said, reaching out his hand and taking hers. "Remember that it was to save Lawrence, not your violin. Besides, there would still have been time, if I had worked."

He rose, suddenly, and stood erect and tall beside her.

"Adrea," he said, "do you remember the pose? Can you take it again, just as you sat that day when I stood by the hedge and saw you looking up so happily and so wistfully from the letter you held in your hand?"

Almost unconsciously she fell into the familiar attitude, and on her face there was even something of the same expression that had been his inspiration.

He came near her, and touched her, first on

the shoulder. Then with his fingers, lightly, beginning with her hair, he passed his hands over her, down to her very feet.

"Yes," he breathed, as though to himself, "you have it. It is the same, all but the letter, the letter that made your eyes shine so like an angel's."

All at once his tone changed, and a deep, earnest note thrilled her.

"Adrea, tell me, whose was that letter?"

As he spoke he dropped down quickly on the seat beside her. She looked at him, the tenderness in her eyes all lost upon his sightless ones.

"Do you really want to know?" she asked, hardly above a whisper.

"Yes," he said.

"It was your own letter, Morton. The only one you ever wrote to me."

Love is blind. It needs no eyes. Morton Payne, at that moment, saw as clearly as any man, and what he saw was the love of a girl's heart. He felt it, overflowing, mingling with the great tide in his own heart and making a nectar that infused its perfume deep into both their souls.

"I love you, Adrea," he said. "Do you care for me, really?"

"Yes, Morton," she answered, bending her head until his lips touched her hair.

"Could you marry a man like me, a blind man?"

"Yes, Morton."

"Do you know what sort of a life it would be? A life of sacrifice. Could you make it, and—could I accept it?"

"Yes, Morton," she said again. And then she laid her two hands upon his eyes, one arm going softly about his neck, and she drew him down until his head rested against her breast.

"And," he said at last, "you cared for me as long ago as that letter?"

"Yes, dear," she answered happily. "I have always cared."

Something in the air about them, perhaps the gentle spirits of other lovers who had long ago departed from the earth, seemed to settle down, enclosing that garden nook away from the rest of the world, so that the two did not hear the soft footfall of a man upon the grass, quite near them.

They did not look up, and after he had stood silently watching them for a moment he went back the way he came. He sought the porch of the house where a great man with a bared and shaggy head, like a lion's, sat waiting.

And as the big man heard the step, and looked up inquiringly, and eagerly, he was puzzled to see that the younger man's face was a little pale, and that, as he stopped before him, he held himself wearily, as if he had just come a long way.

The older man said nothing, waiting for the younger to speak.

When the words came, it was plain that they

were spoken with an effort, and though there was the ghost of a brave smile on the lips and an attempt at lightness in the tone, it seemed as if the eyes had, all at once, lost something of their youth, for they did not smile.

"Mr. Wostenholm, your daughter is in the garden, but we shall have to wait for a little. She is engaged."

THE END.

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